



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### **Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

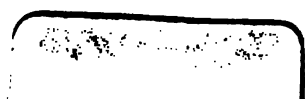
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### **About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>















**THE BISHOP'S PURSE**









“Then, in a flash of inspiration, unseen by the others, she did the one thing that could save her.”

[Page 14]

**THE  
BISHOP'S PURSE**


BY  
**CLEVELAND MOFFETT**  
AND  
**OLIVER HERFORD**



**ILLUSTRATED**

**D. APPLETON AND COMPANY**  
**NEW YORK AND LONDON**

**1913**




**COPYRIGHT, 1913, BY  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY**

---

**Copyright, 1912, by CLEVELAND MOFFETT and  
OLIVER HERFORD**

**Printed in the United States of America**



**TO OUR FRIENDS IN  
LAKEWOOD, NEW JERSEY  
WHERE THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN**



## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. HESTER STORM GIVES HER NAME AS JENNY REGAN. . . . .	I
II. SHOWING THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOLF BAG . .	14
III. PRESENTING HIRAM BAXTER . . . . .	19
IV. A SHOCK FOR BETTY . . . . .	26
V. THE REV. HORATIO MERLE . . . . .	45
VI. HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK . . . . .	56
VII. THE NEW SECRETARY. . . . .	68
VIII. A FACE IN THE GLASS . . . . .	84
IX. A FLASH OF MEMORY. . . . .	96
X. HORATIO DISCOVERS A PEPPERMINT TREE . .	102
XI. LAUGHTER IN THE DARK . . . . .	114
XII. THE GRAY LADY . . . . .	124
XIII. FIRST AID TO THE INJURED . . . . .	136
XIV. THE PARABLE OF THE COCOANUT PIE . . .	147
XV. THE FOUR POTTLES . . . . .	157
XVI. THE DESERT ISLAND . . . . .	167
XVII. THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE . . . . .	178
XVIII. MARTIN LUTHER . . . . .	187
XIX. THE MISSING PAGE . . . . .	196
XX. THE REVEREND HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE .	205
XXI. THE QUARREL . . . . .	216
XXII. A PROBLEM IN VIRTUOUS STRATEGY . . .	229
XXIII. A SCRAP OF PAPER . . . . .	233



## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIV. DELIVERING THE GOODS . . . . .	238
XXV. THE LOCKED DOOR . . . . .	254
XXVI. UNDER THE ROSE . . . . .	265
XXVII. LIONEL AND KATE . . . . .	270
XXVIII. THE THREAT . . . . .	280
XXIX. ENTER GRIMES . . . . .	289
XXX. THE PENITENT . . . . .	299
XXXI. LIONEL TO THE RESCUE . . . . .	306
XXXII. THE STORM . . . . .	310
XXXIII. "HER PROMISE TRUE" . . . . .	324
XXXIV. THE FIVE-BAR GATE . . . . .	333

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
“Then, in a flash of inspiration, unseen by the others, she did the one thing that could save her.” . . . . . <i>Frontispiece</i>	
“It seemed to Hester that she had seen this man somewhere before.” . . . . .	94
“‘Betty!’ he cried. ‘Are you ill?’” . . . . .	226
“‘No! You mustn’t see him. Let me speak to you—alone.’” . . . . .	296



# THE BISHOP'S PURSE

## CHAPTER I

### HESTER STORM GIVES HER NAME AS JENNY REGAN

**A** NEAR-SIGHTED German music teacher crossed his legs at an inopportune moment, and this trivial action led directly to the startling incidents of the following narrative, with their momentous effects upon several lives.

This singular occurrence took place on a railway train in England, a boat train with passengers from Paris, three of these, a strangely assorted trio, being brought together by fate within the respectable cushioned walls of a first-class carriage. On one side sat an English bishop, in formal black garments, talking with evident interest and a certain deference to a very pretty and smartly dressed American girl, whose fresh views and charming lack of reverence seemed to delight the rather heavy-minded but well-meaning prelate.

Small wonder that the ecclesiastical gaze was held in rapt attention, for Miss Betty Thompson (of New York and recently of Paris) was not only fair to look upon with her teasing blue eyes, her long curling lashes, her auburn hair shot through with golden lights and her adorable mouth upturned at the corners, but she added to these the fatal gift of unexpectedness. So the bishop

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

looked and listened and marveled, while the tired lines faded from his face and he reflected that, after all, the ride from Dover to London was very short, amazingly short.

The other one of this trio, whose meeting here was to have such far-reaching consequences, was a quietly attired young woman, traveling alone, her black hair and warm ivory coloring seeming to indicate a Latin origin. She, too, was a girl of striking beauty, but there was something of sadness and yearning in the depths of her lustrous dark eyes. As if weary with the journey, she dozed from time to time or seemed to doze, her thick lashes lifting occasionally for a languid glance at her companions and then drooping again, while a faint, half-wistful smile played about her full red lips.

"An interesting face," whispered the bishop to his young friend. "A singularly interesting face. Wouldn't you say so, Miss Thompson?"

Betty studied the sleeping girl a moment and nodded thoughtfully. "A sort of wild beauty. I've been looking at her and wondering if—" She paused in perplexity.

"You think she is a fellow countrywoman?" suggested the bishop.

"I'm not sure, but—I think she's unhappy and—" as the stranger stirred uneasily, "did you ever see anything so deliciously green as these hedges?"

The dark-eyed girl was far away in her reveries, living over again fragments of her life that seemed to flash by in lurid memory pictures, just as this rushing English landscape flashed before her half-closed eyes.

Now . . . the great halls of Monte Carlo, hushed groups around green-covered tables, worshiping groups, one would say, with tense, eager faces—and the clink of

## **HESTER GIVES NAME AS JENNY REGAN**

---

gold. Stupid people! Bound to lose their money anyway, so—what did it matter?

Now . . . the blue of the moon-kissed Mediterranean and a sighing orchestra playing on the marble terrace. And that most ridiculously careless South American general with his gold cigarette case! Fancy having real rubies and emeralds set in a cigarette case! What did the man expect?

Now . . . the pigeons at Mentone, circling in frightened sweep over the lazy gardens while a Russian countess suns herself by the beds of chrysanthemums. What a fool to carry all that jewelry in a hand-bag!

Now . . . Paris, a nice enough town and they could have it. All very fine driving in the bois and sipping tea at the Continental, but American secret service men were nosing about and—it's a pity if a girl can't speak a friendly word to an old lady from Grand Rapids, Michigan, without getting called down for it. Time to move on, Hester Storm, especially as you have eight hundred dollars in good coin tucked away and the jewelry. So one ticket, please, to Manhattan Island, for a girl who is going home and—wants to look her sister Rosalie in the eyes and—is just a little sorry for certain things and—anyhow, she's going to keep straight, yes, straight for the rest of her natural life.

At this moment, by some perversity of chance, a phrase in the droning talk opposite caught Hester's ear and brought her to alert attention.

"Five thousand pounds, my dear: not a penny less," the bishop declared impressively.

The Storm girl tingled with sudden interest, yet managed to keep her eyes closed. Then, gradually and cau-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

tiously, she lifted her heavy lashes and peeped through them. The bishop was fussing with a handbag, searching for something, taking something out, a purse of brown leather, a fat purse with a heavy elastic band around it. And, in his bland, pompous way he was telling Miss Thompson about his recent and most successful visit to America in the interest of the Progressive Mothers' Society. The Americans had been so kind to him, so generous; their contributions, together with those of Americans in Paris, amounted to this splendid sum that he was now carrying back to London.

Five thousand pounds! And he explained the extraordinary combination of circumstances that had prevented him, at the last moment, just as he was leaving Paris, from depositing this money with his bankers.

Five thousand pounds! It was evidently wiser, unquestionably safer, to remove so large a sum from his careless handbag to the shelter of his ecclesiastical coat, the inside pocket—there! And straightway the transfer was effected with a benignant smile, while the stranger sized up the situation very much as a professional golf player would study a difficult shot.

Not that Hester had any personal interest in this fat brown leather pocketbook or any designs upon it. No, no! She was done with that sort of thing, quite done with it, but from the detached standpoint of a former expert she could not help reflecting that here was an opportunity, a most unusual opportunity, if one could just see the right way of handling it.

Then she thought of the very large sum involved. Five thousand pounds! Twenty-five thousand dollars! How small it made her poor little eight hundred seem! Twenty-five thousand dollars! A fortune—all one could

## **HESTER GIVES NAME AS JENNY REGAN**

---

ever need! And there it was for the taking. There in the loosely hung black coat of an absent-minded bishop! Dear, dear, if this wonderful chance had only come sooner—before she made her good resolutions!

However, she had made them and would hold to them. She had given her promise to Rosalie, her promise true, and come what might she was going to keep straight. The bishop's purse was perfectly safe so far as she was concerned. Besides, with only three of them in the carriage, she couldn't get the purse if she wanted to. There must be other passengers, two or three others, so that the coppers would have some one besides her to put the blame on when the big squeal came. There must be at least two other passengers.

As Hester reached this purely academic conclusion the train drew up at a small station and the guard ushered in a near-sighted German music teacher, followed by a friend, who proved to be a trombone player, a very irascible person, and these two straightway fell into a heated discussion of the poisonous and non-poisonous qualities of mushrooms.

The dark-eyed dreamer smiled at the coincidence of their arrival, but remained unshaken in her resolve to leave the bishop's purse alone and all other purses likewise. Too well she remembered that little affair at the Elysée Palace Hotel. Ugh! When Grimes fixed his cold gray eyes on her! Grimes from Scotland Yard, who happened to be in Paris on a case. Stupid man, who couldn't understand how easily a girl might mistake another woman's cloak for her own! What if it was of costly Russian sable? What did that prove? It was most annoying, and, having wriggled out of this misadven-



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

ture, Hester did not propose ever again to risk another one.

Besides, it would take more than these two chattering musicians to help her. There must be a mob to shove and jostle. His nobs in the knee breeches must be standing up and somebody must push him against her or trip him up, so that in the scuffle she could sneak the leather.

And now, suddenly, as Hester was fortifying herself in this prudent and virtuous decision, there came one of those trifling happenings that change the course of lives and empires—the near-sighted German music teacher crossed his legs. Whereupon the Bishop of Bunchester, who was just starting for the door, as the train drew into Chatham Junction, stumbled over the extended member and was thrown with some violence into Hester's corner, more precisely into Hester's lap, losing his glasses in transit, and was only rescued from this embarrassing position and brought again to a dignified perpendicular after much confusion with assistance and profuse apologies from the two Germans, which apologies the bishop gallantly passed on to the young woman upon whom he had so abruptly descended.

At Chatham Junction there was a stop of ten minutes, during which time the bishop and Miss Thompson walked briskly up and down the platform, but Hester kept her place by the window, looking out with the same odd little smile and wistful glance that had so interested Betty and her venerable friend. When these two returned to their seats the German musicians were gone and as the train resumed its journey to London, the fateful three were once more alone in the carriage.

The bishop and his young friend were now in gay spirits, laughing over something which Betty, apparently,

## HESTER GIVES NAME AS JENNY REGAN

---

had been describing with delicious drollery. In the self-absorption of their camaraderie, in their utter indifference to Hester's presence, they seemed to her brooding mind, to exclude her as completely from their social atmosphere as if she were a servant. And for some strange reason, the psychic meaning of which she was to understand later, the girl found herself hurt and irritated by this attitude of unconscious superiority.

The Storm girl stirred uneasily. Her wistful smile hardened into a bitter twist of the lips and through half-shut, envious eyes she studied this other American girl, this fortunate being whose every gesture, every tone of voice and every exquisite detail of costume bore witness to the background of culture and wealth that had always been hers. Why should this piece of pink-and-white prettiness be given all the good gifts, money, social position, friends, while she, Hester Storm, had none of these and never would have? It was all unfair! This whole scheme of life was a—it was a crooked game, where the cards were stacked against some people all their lives. What would this spoiled darling over there, with her clothes and her swell ways—what would she have done if she'd been born in a rotten tenement and—had a sick sister that she loved—a sister she'd die for—like Rosalie? Would she have done any better? Would she?

In the midst of her self-justification, Hester's attention was arrested by a sudden eager interest shown by Miss Thompson in the bishop's talk, which now concerned a man named Hiram Baxter, Betty's guardian, who had, it appeared, crossed on the steamer with the bishop the week before.

"Such a picturesque character, Miss Thompson; so generous and—er—self-reliant and—er——"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Careful now," warned Betty playfully. "You know Mr. Baxter is very dear to me. Father and he were partners and—he's been like a father to me."

"I know, my child. I only said he was a picturesque character."

"But you were thinking of his slips in grammar and his funny little ways of talking—I just love them."

There was a thrill of almost passionate loyalty in Betty's voice. The bishop, glancing at her eager, flushed face, thought that he had never seen anything lovelier than this ardent championship of Hiram Baxter's foibles.

"I assure you, my dear," he said, hastening to correct her suspicion that he was making fun of Hiram, "I honor Mr. Baxter for the rare qualities of mind and heart that have made him the great man that he is, for the splendid traits that have lifted him to fortune and success from—shall I say so humble a beginning?"

Betty's beautiful eyes kindled with a glow of fondness. "Did he tell you about that? Isn't it splendid the way he fought his way to the top?" Then she added, with a teasing glance, "You see, Guardy has managed his life on the American plan."

"Which abounds in surprises, Miss Thompson, as you may discover."

Betty turned quickly. "What do you mean by that? Did Guardy tell you something?"

The bishop smiled mysteriously. "Mr. Baxter told me a number of things. We walked the deck for hours. We smoked together in the evenings, and—really, I never enjoyed a voyage more."

"Yes, but what did he tell you? Please?" She leaned forward eagerly. "Does it—does it concern me?"

"In a way, but—it's more the general idea. A most extraordinary, a most amusing idea. 'Mr. Baxter,' I said to him when he told me, 'upon my soul, I never met a man like you.'"

"But what was it? Please tell me."

"And Baxter said to me"—the prelate's ample body shook with suppressed merriment—" 'Bish,' he said—you know he always calls me 'Bish'—I wish I could remember the speech he made, it was so—so deliciously American. 'Bish,' he said, with that slow drawl of his, 'I'll bet ye four dollars and a quarter'—now what was the rest of it?"

"Never mind the rest of it," interrupted Betty. "Tell me what Guardy's idea is. I must know."

The bishop hesitated while Betty pouted her pretty lips and played petulantly with the strap of her golf bag that stood near. "I suppose he's going to scold me for being extravagant. Is that it?"

The bishop was about to reply when he started in sudden alarm, and, clapping his hand to his coat pocket, exclaimed: "Bless my soul! My purse!"

"Your purse? Why—what?"

The prelate made no answer, but rising quickly, he searched through his garments with grave concern, then, looking at Betty in dismay, he said slowly: "It's gone. I put it in this pocket—you saw me put it there, my dear, and—it's gone."

For some moments neither spoke. Then, by a common impulse, they turned and looked at the stranger whose innocent dark eyes met them with friendly interest and concern.

"I beg your pardon," said the bishop awkwardly. "You haven't by any chance seen a—a purse of mine?"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"A purse," repeated Hester sweetly.

"I may have dropped it," he explained, searching the carriage floor in perplexity. Then he squinted upward at the luggage racks as if expecting to find the purse there.

"You couldn't have dropped it," said Betty. "I saw you put it in your pocket; your inside pocket. It's most extraordinary."

"It's an extremely serious matter," fumed the bishop, and glancing out of the window he saw that they were running into a station.

"I'm sorry," Hester said in a low, sympathetic voice. "Hadn't you better call the guard?"

At this moment Betty sprang up with a cry of understanding. "I have it! Those two Germans! Don't you remember, Bishop, when they jostled against you? You remember?" she turned to Hester.

"Yes, I remember," nodded the dark-eyed girl.

"I wonder—" reflected the prelate.

"There's no doubt of it," pursued Betty. "That's how pickpockets work—two or three together."

As the train stopped the guard was summoned, and for some minutes there was greater excitement in the little station of Farmingdale than had been known there for years. The Bishop of Bunchester robbed of five thousand pounds! Robbed in a railway carriage in broad daylight! The news spread like wildfire, and presently the station master, the guard and the one officer on duty, were in low-voiced conclave at the carriage door, while wondering groups gathered on the platform. Five thousand pounds!

A careful search of the carriage having revealed nothing, it was decided that the three travelers must alight

## HESTER GIVES NAME AS JENNY REGAN

---

with their luggage so that the robbery could be further investigated while the train proceeded to London.

"I'll have to ask you to come this way, young lady," said the officer presently, to Hester. "Don't get excited. I'm not saying you took it, but you were in the carriage and—we've got to be on the safe side. How about her, your lordship?" He looked at Betty.

The bishop drew himself up to his full official dignity. "This is Miss Thompson, my friend, who is traveling with me."

"Oh! Beg pardon, miss. We have to know these things." He touched his hat apologetically to Betty. Then turning to the Storm girl: "Now then, it will only take a few minutes"; but his whispered instructions to the station master's wife were that the search must be thorough. The station master's wife nodded grimly and beckoned the girl to follow her into a private room, which Hester did with such an air of simple innocence, showing neither fear nor bravado, that she made a most favorable impression.

"I'm sure she had nothing to do with it," declared Betty. And the bishop agreed that it must have been the Germans.

"We have telegraphed the Chatham police to arrest them, your lordship," said the officer.

A little later the station master's wife reappeared, with mollified visage, and reported that she had searched Hester with the greatest care and had found no sign of the purse nor anything that was in the least suspicious. Furthermore, the girl's frank, honest manner had convinced her that she was innocent.

"Of course she is!" cried Betty, taking the stranger's

---

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

two hands in hers with quick sympathy. "I knew you didn't take it."

Hester's eyes filled with tears at this proof of confidence. She hesitated a moment as if scarcely able to speak, and then: "Thank you, thank you," she murmured.

It was now decided that the Bishop of Bunchester must return at once to Chatham for the purpose of identifying the suspected Germans. There was a train going back shortly.

"You will pardon me, my dear Miss Thompson, for not escorting you to London, as I promised Mr. Baxter, but you see the seriousness, the urgency——"

"Don't think of me. I'll get to London all right. Thank you for your kindness, and I do hope you'll find the purse." Betty gave the bishop her slim gloved hand, and as he looked into her lovely face, so genuinely sympathetic, he could not help reflecting that in his whole episcopal experience he had never met a more charming, a more fascinating young woman than Betty Thompson.

Thus it came about that Betty, on a later train, made the last half hour of her journey to London without the bishop's companionship; but not alone, for she insisted that Hester go with her and sit beside her. To this the station authorities consented, after carefully recording the girl's name (she gave it as Jenny Regan of New York City) and other essential facts concerning her. The purse was certainly not on the girl's person nor in her luggage, and, all things considered, there was no justification for holding an American citizen against whom there appeared to be not a shadow of evidence.

So once more it happened that these two young women, so sharply contrasted in character and in physical

## HESTER GIVES NAME AS JENNY REGAN

beauty, sat together in a first-class railway carriage, quite by themselves this time. There was something about Hester Storm (alias Jenny Regan) that interested Betty strangely, something different. She felt that here was a girl worth studying, and she wished to make amends, if possible, for that humiliating search.

They talked of various things. Betty tactful, sympathetic, vaguely puzzled. Hester equally tactful, equally sympathetic and keenly on her guard, for the truth is that the Storm girl's good resolutions had not been proof against an untoward combination of circumstances; and when the Bishop of Bunchester was rudely tumbled against her, she had yielded to temptation, and with one swift, skillful movement had withdrawn the purse from the episcopal pocket; in other words, Hester Storm had stolen the five thousand pounds!



## CHAPTER II

### SHOWING THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOLF BAG

**I**T must now be revealed (since this is a straightforward tale) that the stolen five thousand pounds was all this time snugly reposing in a most unlikely hiding place which Hester, with quick resourcefulness, had hit upon when she saw the guard approaching. At that moment the purse was hidden in her dress, but she knew she could not keep it there; a search would certainly be made, and—where could she hide it? What could she do with it?

The guard turned the handle of the carriage door and there came for Hester a moment of sickening despair as she realized her desperate peril; then, in a flash of inspiration, unseen by the others, she did the one thing that could save her: she dropped the bishop's purse into the open mouth of Betty Thompson's golf bag.

Now the bottom of a golf bag is about the last spot on earth where anyone would expect to find a missing purse; yet, as devotees of this sport will agree, a more admirable place of concealment could scarcely be imagined. Far down in a jumble of heavy clubs the purse lies unseen by the keenest eye and beyond reach of the longest arm. To search the bottom of a golf bag would involve taking out all the clubs and turning the bag upside down, but who would do that? Who would go exploring for stolen treasure in so battered and so innocently open a receptacle?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOLF BAG

---

---

All of which, in the first emergency, favored Hester, but now, with the danger past, made it difficult for her to carry out her plan. How was she to get the purse? There it was, almost within reach of her fingers, yet tantalizingly out of reach. It was maddening to think that, with so great a prize so nearly won; she might still lose everything simply because a stupid, flimsy barrier of canvas and leather stood in her way.

The Storm girl concentrated all her faculties on this new problem, and thrilled with the exhilaration of a brilliant coup almost accomplished. There was no more question of scruples or regrets. She had made the break and must see the thing through. A rather neat piece of work so far, but the hardest part remained. The crisis would come when the train reached London. Good old Charing Cross Station!

As she studied the situation, searching desperately for some master move, Hester talked to Betty, letting the conversation drift as the latter pleased and keeping sweetly to her attitude of virtue injured but resigned; also showing the most touching, almost tearful, gratitude (not all assumed) for Betty's kindness. Glibly she spun a hard-luck story of loneliness and friendlessness and the disappointing result of her efforts to be a nursery governess. Betty was deeply interested, very sorry, and finally offered her protégé five pounds, which Hester at first refused, but finally, rather shamefacedly, accepted, thinking it more in character to do so. She would certainly send back that five pounds and fifty with it, once she had gotten safely away with the five thousand.

Yes, but that was the point. How was she going to do it? How could she get the purse? If she could only think of something. She must think of something.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

There was not a moment to lose. Even now they were roaring into London city, and—suddenly the inspiration came—it was a chance, the only chance, and Hester took it.

Rising from their seats they gathered up their belongings. The dark-eyed girl slipped over her shoulders a brilliant red cloak, the red being of so striking a shade that Betty remembered it afterward. Then very simply and naturally Hester turned to her benefactress. "Let me help you with your things. I have only this little bundle. There!" and without more ado she took the golf bag.

"Thanks!" smiled Betty. "You must come to see me while you are in England. I'll give you my card. Well, here we are!"

With grinding wheels the train drew up in Charing Cross station, and amid a great slamming of doors the passengers swarmed out and made their way briskly down the long platform. Betty went first, explaining to her friend that, in all probability, no one would meet her, owing to their change of train, yet searching in the crowd for some familiar face. Hester searched faces, too, for she knew that word of the robbery must have been telegraphed ahead to London, and as they passed through narrow gates in the iron barrier that separated the tracks from the station proper her heart was pounding furiously, although her face showed only a sweet and trusting smile. No one stopped them here, and with a sigh of relief Hester followed on, trying to quiet the rattle of the golf clubs and gradually lagging behind her eager friend.

Now, just before them, rose the circle of a wide newsstand, beyond which were two exits, one on either side

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOLF BAG

---

of the station. Betty was moving toward the left-hand exit and here, in a second, Hester saw her opportunity. Sheltered by the newsstand, she had only to steer quickly toward the right-hand exit and then, before Betty could even suspect that she was missing, make her getaway into the myriad streets of London. It was too easy and the girl was already gloating over the trick as finally turned when her heart froze within her, for there at the corner of the newsstand were the cold gray eyes she knew so well fixed pitilessly on her. Grimes of Scotland Yard!

It was a critical moment for Hester. Had she weakened by the quiver of an eyelash, had she started ever so slightly, the detective would have taken her there and then, for he remembered her well and the suspicious circumstances of that sable cloak episode. But she, schooled in self-control, swept on serenely without a sign of recognition. Grimes turned and followed her.

"Caught with the goods," muttered the girl, and faint with fear but unfaltering, she swung back to the left in Betty's wake, for here now was her only hope of safety. Grimes was close behind.

As they reached the street, Betty nodded for a taxicab and gave her things to a chauffeur, who came forward eagerly. Then, seating herself on the cushions, she turned pleasantly to Hester.

"It was good of you to carry that heavy bag. I'll take it in here—that's right. Remember I'm at the Savoy for a day or two with Mr. Hiram Baxter. And here is our address in Surrey. There." And, smiling most cordially, she gave Hester her card.

"Hiram Baxter! The American millionaire!" reflected Grimes, puzzled, but still confident.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"You'll come to see me, won't you?" called the fair young woman as the taxicab rolled away.

"Yes," answered Hester, her dark eyes glowing on the ravished golf bag. "I'll come."

Then, with quiet self-possession, she turned and her eyes met Grimes.

"Ah, little one!" he chuckled, roughly familiar.

"How dare you speak to me!" she protested with such an air of well-bred anger that he drew back, hesitating.

"Excuse me, but—haven't I seen you before?" he stammered.

Hester swept him with a scornful glance. "I thought an American lady was safe from insult in the streets of London," she said, and before he had recovered from his astonishment she had entered a waiting hansom and was gone.

## CHAPTER III

### PRESENTING HIRAM BAXTER

**H**IRAM BAXTER, whose hidden purposes were responsible for Betty's sudden and momentous journey to London, was, in this year of the first flying machine, one of the few really interesting self-made men to be found in New York City, where such sturdy and picturesque types are rapidly disappearing. At fifty-five Baxter was a big, grizzled fellow, with a pair of straight shoulders, a friendly smile and a way of using the English language that was absolutely and delightfully his own.

"This grammar business ain't much of a trick," he would declare, with his slow characteristic drawl. "I could swing it any time I wanted to, but where's the sense o' wearin' high collars and patent leather boots if yer neck and yer feet ain't comf'table in 'em? Suppose I say to you, 'I like them peaches'? You say those peaches. I say, no, them peaches. You say it's wrong. I say it don't make a hang o' difference, it don't hurt you an' it don't hurt me an' it don't hurt the peaches."

Baxter invariably dressed in simple black garments, including a wide-brimmed soft black hat, that gave him in repose, with his ruddy, rugged visage, somewhat the look of an English bishop, as had been more than once remarked by his episcopal friend of Bunchester.

"It ain't because I like it that I wear black," Hiram

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

sometimes explained, "and it ain't because I'm sad. The fact is black's the only safe color fer me if I want a happy home. Why, if I ever let myself go on colored vests an' striped pants, an' fancy neckties, my wife'd start fer a divorce the next mornin'. Yes, sir."

When Hiram laughed his blue eyes twinkled at you under shaggy black brows and his strong teeth gleamed at you beneath his white mustache; then, perhaps, he resembled a bluff German statesman. But as soon as he spoke you knew he was American through and through, and, somehow, you thought none the less of him for his quaint lapses in speech. Not all the rules of prosody and syntax could alter the fact that Hiram Baxter was a figure of compelling power, a strongly original and lovable man, who inspired immediate confidence in his wonderful resourcefulness.

It was during his recent voyage on the *Lusitania*, in the course of a brisk walk on the upper deck, that Baxter took the Bishop of Bunchester into his confidence regarding certain serious personal matters. Hiram's friendship with the bishop was of long standing, for the American some twenty-eight years before, at the outset of his varied career, had married an English lady, a distant connection of the prelate's, and it had long been the Baxters' custom to divide their year between a comfortable home in Washington Square, New York, and a country place in Surrey, about two hours out of London, where Mrs. Baxter entertained numerous relatives and friends with lavish hospitality.

"I tell ye, Bish," Hiram broke out abruptly, "it ain't by a man's successes that ye can size up his character. No, sir. It's by the mistakes he makes an' the way he faces 'em and gets out of 'em. Why, I know a doctor

## PRESENTING HIRAM BAXTER

---

up in New Hampshire—homeliest feller I ever seen—he got rich makin' cough medicine out o' shingles."

"Bless my soul! Shingles!" the bishop exclaimed.

"Yes, sir; shingles. Good pine shingles. A whole lumber yard full of 'em. He got 'em in foreclosure proceedings—hadn't the first notion what to do with them shingles until he happened to think of cough medicine. That turned the trick. Ever heard of 'Peck's Peerless Pectoral'? It was his invention—stewed it out o' them shingles, every bottle of it; and say, Bish, it's great stuff. Which is what I call makin' the best of yer mistakes, for it ain't every country doctor could see his way to snatchin' victory out of a lot o' discredited pine shingles."

This bit of homely philosophy was received by the distinguished churchman with amused approval.

"Very true, my dear Baxter, but I don't see how this applies to you."

"I'll show ye," chortled Hiram. "Ever hear o' the feller that used to wear detachable cuffs and then went broke because he bought a shirt that had cuffs sewed on? No? It's a fact. Ye see he had to get a swell suit to match the shirt, and a swell fur overcoat to match the suit, and a swell automobile to match the fur overcoat, and the first thing he knew he was such a swell he blew up an' busted."

"What an extraordinary fancy!" exclaimed the bishop, laughing immoderately.

"Fancy nothing. It's a fact," declared Baxter. "And I want to tell you I've been a little that way myself. I've been tryin' to live up to the standards o' my wife an' my wife's relations. That's where I've made my mistake. Yes, sir. I'm only a rough feller, Bish, but—well, I married Eleanor and—you know what she is.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Swell English family and—grand ideas, and—you understand. D'ye think I'm stuck on havin' a country place in England? Asbury Park 'd suit me a lot better, but Eleanor wanted it. She said it was the proper thing and—so I took Ipping House, with its ancestral towers and its dungeons and a lot o' blamed foolishness. Excuse me, Bish, but that's what it is. And as fer relatives——” he paused with a grim tightening of the lips.

“My dear Baxter,” put in the prelate, “you surely do not regret the old-fashioned English hospitality that you and your excellent wife have been practicing?”

“Well,” drawled Hiram, “if old-fashioned English hospitality consists in bein' worked in every conceivable way by a lot of impecunious third cousins that never did a day's work in their lives, then I say it's time old-fashioned English hospitality got inoculated with some new-fashioned American common sense. Why, with Lionel Fitz Brown, my wife's third cousin, and Kate Clendenin, the Countess Kate, and the two Merles and various others, my house is about as much like a home as a Narragansett hotel. Now take Merle.”

“Horatio Merle?” interjected the bishop. “You don't mean——”

“Yes, I do,” continued Baxter, “the Rev. Horatio Merle, my wife's second cousin once removed. As good a man as ever thumped a Bible—you know what I mean, Bish,” Hiram added quickly, mistaking for a sign of disapproval the cough which the reverend auditor had substituted for a chuckle. “Yes, sir, for a downright, pure-hearted Christian you might go through the British Isles with a fine-tooth comb and not find another like Horatio Merle; but what good does that do him? He's lost five preachin' jobs in three years, and for the last six months

## PRESENTING HIRAM BAXTER

---

the only flocks that have had the benefit of his pulpit oratory have been the birds and butterflies at Bainbridge Manor. I tell you, Bish, he missed his vocation. He ought to have been one of them nature sharps."

"I believe you are right," assented the bishop. "Horatio Merle would have made his mark as a naturalist. I never knew a man in whom the love of nature was more beautifully developed. He is a sort of modern St. Francis."

"Modern St. Francis," snorted Hiram. "I don't know who he was, but if he could beat Horatio Merle——" he broke off with a broad grin. "Say, Bish, did ye hear how Horatio lost his last preachin' job?"

"Why, no. How was that?"

"Seems he was goin' to church one Sunday mornin', and passin' by the canal he saw some boys tryin' to drown a kitten. They'd just hitched a stone around its neck when Merle caught sight of 'em.

"'You young rascals,' he called out, but he was too late, and the next minute the poor little thing splashed into the water. Well, sir, that was too much for Horatio. He knew the church folks were waitin' for him, but he couldn't help it. He just waded into that canal, black clothes and all, and fished out the kitten. Then he went ahead with his religious duties while the water dripped down under his robes and the congregation made up their minds that he was plumb crazy."

"Poor Merle!" reflected the bishop. "And what became of the kitten?"

"Why, he's got him yet. A big black cat now. Martin Luther's his name, and wherever Merle goes there's Martin Luther taggin' after him like Mary's little lamb. Understand, Bish, I like Merle; I like to have him

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

'round. As far as that goes I like the rest of 'em, but——” Here his face clouded.

“My dear Baxter,” said the bishop sympathetically, “I understand these little family annoyances, but after all you're a rich man and——”

“Yes,” cut in Hiram, “I'm a rich man, and if I don't look out I'll wake up some fine morning and find myself”—here the fighting spirit flashed in Hiram's honest blue eyes, and with a swing of his powerful shoulders—“no, I won't, either,” he added. “I'll beat those Wall Street devils yet; I'll beat 'em at their own game.”

Then Baxter, in strict confidence, explained to the bishop the nature of the difficulties in which he innocently found himself, difficulties that put in jeopardy every dollar of his fortune and with it the happiness and welfare of his family.

The prelate followed this narrative with sympathetic interest and concern, and then listened with growing astonishment while Baxter outlined briefly his programme, which, after all, was based on a very simple idea, yet was so unusual that the average person would have at once rejected it as impossible.

Thus the bishop at once objected: “But, my good friend, this is out of the question, quite out of the question.”

“Why is it?” persisted Hiram.

“For one thing your wife will never consent.”

“Won't she? You wait and see.”

“For another thing I feel obliged to say——”

“You feel obliged to say,” chuckled Baxter, “that it's a crazy notion. Bet ye four dollars and a quarter that's what ye think. But listen to me, Bish. I've made my fortune doin' crazy things. Once I bought three thou-

## PRESENTING HIRAM BAXTER

---

and plug hats at auction in Chicago fer eight hundred dollars, an' I sold 'em at dollar apiece in Denver for a political parade. I've bought busted railroads and watched 'em come up to par. I've bought played-out oil wells an' made 'em spout gold. Why, I even bought an old church once with a haunted graveyard and got square on the marble in it, with all the land as velvet."

"Dear, dear, dear! A haunted graveyard?" murmured the bishop.

"Yes, sir; and I'll put this thing through the same as I did that, because it's a good idea. A big, sound, American idea. Now you just watch me."

## CHAPTER IV

### A SHOCK FOR BETTY

ONE immediate consequence of the golf-bag-purse-vanishing episode narrated above, was a delay of two hours in Betty Thompson's arrival in London, which delay meant that Hiram Baxter and his wife, having waited vainly at Charing Cross station for the expected traveler, had now returned, quite out of sorts, especially Mrs. Baxter, to their rooms at the Savoy Hotel.

"I think it's very inconsiderate of Betty to be so careless about her trains. You wired her, didn't you?" said the wife as she stood before a cheval glass preparatory to removing a new and very large green velvet picture hat, with gold-brown plumes and drooping brim. Beneath this effective covering her hair was discreetly shadowed, her eyes, if they were calculating, seemed only pensive, and the pouting of her mouth was transformed to an expression of winsome pleading—so much for the wizardry of a woman's hat.

As she stood before the mirror Mrs. Baxter's half-turned face wore that sidelong, disquieted look with which a woman always regards her newest hat, half pleasure of possession and half regret for that other hat, the one in the shop that she did not buy and whose fetching colors and enticing lines have ever since haunted her. A pleasing panel picture she made in the black

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

framed oval of the cheval glass, a harmony in green and golden brown. Boldini might have painted that mirror picture of Eleanor Baxter. She was a harmony of insincerities, a woman who seemed to have youth and height and slenderness, but who really had none of these. This, however, was a secret between Mrs. Baxter and her looking-glass.

"I wired her all right," answered Hiram.

"It quite upsets my plans," complained Eleanor. "Of course I was glad to come to town yesterday, dear, to meet you when you arrived from the steamer, but it's most annoying to be kept in London now. All the relatives are expecting you, Hiram."

"Are, eh? How many of 'em?"

"Only Cousin Harriet and Cousin Horatio and Cousin Lionel and the countess. The dear baroness left yesterday. I'm sorry she couldn't stay to see you."

"Yes, it's a pity the dear baroness couldn't stay to see me," said Hiram dryly.

"I'm glad we won't miss the bazaar to-morrow afternoon," Eleanor rattled on; "the Progressive Mothers' bazaar. You know Cousin Horatio delivers the address, and I want you particularly to be there, Hiram."

Baxter nodded thoughtfully. "I suppose so." Then his face gradually broke into a smile. "Progressive Mothers! Say, can ye beat that? I always thought old-fashioned mothers were about right, but the Bish says——"

"Hiram! Please do be more careful of your language!" Eleanor's voice was petulant.

"Oh, I see! It ain't the thing to call old Bunchester, Bish. All right, dearie. What I started to say was that his Lordship o' Bunchester tells me we ain't begun to

hear the last word yet in the matter o' raisin' children. He got five hundred out o' me—I mean dollars."

By this time Mrs. Baxter had composed herself in a comfortable arm-chair, and, having nothing else to do, was studying her husband critically.

"You look tired, Hiram," she decided.

"I'm tired, all right," he nodded.

"You look worried, too."

The big fellow reflected a moment and then said slowly: "Well, I admit I'll feel better when I see Independent Copper about twenty points higher."

Mrs. Baxter eyed him keenly. "Nothing has happened? Nothing is wrong?" she asked with growing alarm.

For a few moments Hiram sat silent, then closing his lips with decision, he answered kindly: "Eleanor, I guess ye'll have to know exactly how things are. Since we've been married, and that's a good many years, I've done my best to make ye happy. I've tried to give ye everything ye wanted. I never thought the time would come, dearie, when I'd have to ask ye to economize, but——"

He hesitated while she listened with widening, startled eyes.

"Hiram!" she gasped.

He bowed with a slow impressiveness that struck terror into her worldly soul. "I'm awful sorry, but the time has come."

"Economize!" repeated Eleanor in a daze. "It isn't possible."

Again Hiram nodded. "Yes, it is. I'm pretty well tied up with the obligations I've undertaken, and—dearie, we've *got* to economize."

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

---

"Oh, if you had only kept out of this copper speculation!" she lamented.

"I couldn't keep out. You knew I couldn't. Bryce Thompson was my partner, my friend, and—he's dead. I ain't goin' to have any slur on his memory. I've paid his debts, dollar fer dollar, and I'm carryin' his copper stock. Bryce made a mistake, but he meant well. He did it fer his daughter, Betty, and"—here Baxter's voice grew tender as he saw Eleanor's distress—"don't you worry, little woman, we'll come out o' this copper fight on top."

These comforting words seemed only to arouse a sharper resentment in Mrs. Baxter, who turned on her husband angrily. "Meantime, our whole household must be upset, and—we must economize. I suppose you're going to discharge some of the servants?"

Hiram answered with his most winning smile: "Say, ye guessed it the first time. We've got a dozen servants up at Ipping House, and I believe five could do the work just as well—or better."

"Absurd!"

"Bet ye seven dollars and a quarter five servants could do the work if we cut out some o' your relatives."

"You needn't say they're all my relatives. How about Betty Thompson? She's more extravagant than any of the others."

"Bet ye she'll be the first one to take her coat off and hustle—when she knows."

Eleanor's lips tightened for another indignant outburst, but, by a great effort, she controlled herself and spoke with her most irritating manner of lofty disapproval: "Hiram! I wish you wouldn't use that vulgar American word."



Baxter stroked his chin thoughtfully under his white mustache. "Think it's vulgar, eh? The English aristocracy think it's vulgar to hustle, but tell me where the English aristocracy would be if it wasn't for the dollars that American fellers like me have hustled for?"

At this juncture Eleanor's maid appeared with word that Miss Betty Thompson had arrived and had gone to her apartment, which, it appeared, did not please her. She wanted a sitting-room overlooking the Thames, whereas this one opened on a court-yard.

"Tell Miss Thompson I'll see her in a moment," said Mrs. Baxter. Then, when the maid had gone: "There! You see Mistress Betty must have the most expensive rooms in the hotel."

"Well, why not?" retorted Baxter. "She thinks she's a rich girl and can afford 'em." He sat looking thoughtfully at his big strong hands while Eleanor rose to go. "I hate to tell her, but—I s'pose I must."

"Of course you must tell her. You should have told her long ago."

"Perhaps. But—remember, Eleanor, not a word about her father's speculations." He spoke with sudden authority.

"I don't see why Betty Thompson shouldn't know the truth about her father. Why should she be spared any more than the rest of us?"

"Because I say so," answered Baxter, with a glance from under his heavy brows that his wife had rarely seen. "It would make her unhappy and it wouldn't do any good." Then in a low tone and with sudden tenderness he added: "Ye know who Betty makes me think of, dearie? Of our little sunshine girl that's—that's gone. She's got the same eyes and—the same pretty

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

---

s, and—say, I wish ye'd send Betty in here, I want talk to her."

leanor looked at her husband without replying, and something changed in her face—something beyond the ardry of any picture hat to conceal. Then, quietly, gathered up her things and left the room. And a minutes later Betty Thompson appeared, a radiant on of youth and sweetness that brought joy to old ter's heart.

Why, Betty!" he exclaimed, stretching out both his ds, and she came to him quickly, her eyes shining a fondness.

Dear Guardy! I'm so glad to see you," she murmured, as he held her in his strong arms and deepened roses of her cheeks with two vigorous and affectionate smacks.

Ain't too big fer an old fellow like me to kiss, are

hen he held her off at arm's length and admired her ly, eager face, and her slender, lithe figure in its b of Paris finery. "Well, well! Yer the real thing, t ye?"

Betty's eyes danced with pleasure. "Do you like this k, Guardy?"

With wise nods of wondering approval Hiram studied uin's exquisitely suave creation of amethyst gray velvet with its narrow trimming of black fox. Thrown lessly over the girl's shoulders was a chiffon scarf of web thinness, marvelously shaded from jonquil yellow to rosy pomegranate. And Betty's burnished brown melted glowingly into the purple lining of her white named leghorn hat, with its knot of pale mauve pansies its tossing topaz plume.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Hiram nodded in approval. "Like the frock and like the girl inside it. Sit down and tell me about things. How d'ye come to be so late? Miss yer train, or—what?"

"Why, we had an adventure," laughed Betty, "a most exciting adventure. Everything went well until we reached Chatham Junction. The bishop was perfectly lovely. He talked of all sorts of things, especially golf. I happened to have my golf bag with me and—you know, he's a great golfer."

"I know," said Baxter. "It gets me how many o' these brainy men like to waste time battin' them foolish little balls around a field. Guess I'll have to tackle it myself one o' these days. Well, what was the adventure?"

Betty's face grew serious, and she described, as clearly as she could, the bishop's misfortune on the train.

"Five thousand pounds!" exclaimed Hiram. "Well, well! Poor old Bish! Ain't that a shame?"

"There was a young woman in the carriage with us," went on Betty, "such an interesting face—rather foreign looking, and, when the bishop found that his purse was gone, he called the guard and the guard called the police and—they insisted on searching this young woman. I was so sorry. I knew she was innocent, and sure enough she was."

"How d'ye know she was innocent?"

"I could see it. She had large, dark eyes, so appealing and—she told me a most pathetic story afterward—and—why do you smile, Guardy?"

"I s'pose ye gave her all the money ye had with ye?" chuckled Baxter.

"I couldn't give her very much. I only had five

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

pounds," answered the young American, her dignity somewhat ruffled.

"Hm! And ye gave her that?"

"Why, yes. I'm going to send her more. I take a great interest in that girl."

"Do, eh? Well, I wouldn't send her any more money. I wouldn't do it, Betty."

There was something in her guardian's tone that made Miss Thompson look at him in surprise and vague apprehension.

"Why not?" she asked.

"I guess you an' me'd better have a little talk, Betty," said Baxter kindly. "Ye remember I wrote ye a couple o' times about yer expenses in Paris and ye sent me back some pretty sharp opinions, the gist of it bein' that ye wanted to spend yer money accordin' to yer own ideas."

"Why shouldn't I? Father left me the money and I'm spending it in a way that he would approve of."

A sharp note sounded in her voice, but Hiram answered with unchanging gentleness. "I know, Betty, Bryce Thompson would have approved of your goin' to the South Pole to pick strawberries, if ye wanted to. He couldn't refuse ye a thing, he never did refuse ye; but I've been left your guardian, Betty, and it's my duty to tell ye that our present state o' finances don't justify givin' away five-pound notes to strange women ye meet on railway trains."

"I'd rather give my money to unfortunate girls who've never had a chance," retorted Betty with increasing spirit, "than—than to gamble it away in Wall Street!"

"Is that a little friendly jab at me?"

Betty tried vainly to control her emotion. "You've

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

always been so good to me, Guardy, so considerate that I hate to say anything unkind, but I read the papers and—I understand more than you think about business.”

“Do, eh? Such as—what?”

“I know there’s a fight going on between two copper companies and—and you’re in it, aren’t you?”

Baxter smiled grimly. “I guess I’m in it, all right.”

“And one company or the other may be ruined. Isn’t that true?”

“Well,” drawled her guardian, “I guess one comp’ny or the other’s liable to find out that the thing they’ve been monkeyin’ with ain’t precisely a Sunday school picnic.”

Betty’s face was tense now with the earnestness of her convictions. “You may think me foolish, and perhaps I shouldn’t say this, but Guardy, I don’t approve of your using father’s money like that.”

“Don’t, eh?” grunted Hiram, then rising from his chair, he walked back and forth with frowns and queer little nods of his massive head. Presently his face cleared and, stopping before Betty, he laid an affectionate hand on her shoulder.

“Child, it looks as if I’ll have to explain a few things to you,” he said, “that I didn’t mean to talk about. You say ye don’t approve of speculatin’ in Wall Street. Neither do I. I got into this copper campaign because—well, it ain’t exactly my fault and—anyhow, there are times when a man’s got to fight fer his life. It’s that way with me just now. As to usin’ yer father’s money——” He hesitated before the steady challenge of her waiting eyes. “Bryce Thompson and I were partners in business for twenty-five years. He was my best

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

---

friend and—ye know I wouldn't breathe a word against his memory?"

"I know," said the girl. "Go on."

"Betty, yer father didn't leave any money." He spoke tenderly but firmly.

In a dull way she repeated the words. "He—he didn't leave any—money." Her voice trailed off into sickening silence.

"Ye know how generous yer father was and—he made unfortunate investments and—when his estate was settled up there wasn't anything left."

"Nothing left!" she murmured, then rousing herself as a new thought came. "But—all this money that you've been sending me?"

"I was glad to do it, Betty."

"It wasn't my money? I had no right to it? Oh!" She stared at him helplessly as the full realization broke upon her.

"I'd never have mentioned it, only——"

"You should have told me long ago. I'm so—sorry and ashamed."

"There, now! It's all right!" He took her two slim hands in his and patted them kindly.

"You've sent me thousands of dollars. I can never pay it back."

"Ye don't have to pay it back."

"But—why did you do it? Why?"

"I'll tell ye why," answered Hiram thoughtfully. "Because I loved yer father, that's one reason, and another is I—I've always loved you, Betty, ever since ye was little."

"Guardy!" she whispered tenderly. "But you must see  
that        "

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"Wait, Betty! The bookkeepin' of life is a queer thing. Ye don't have to make the deservin' column and the lovin' column balance. When ye love ye don't give things because ye owe 'em; ye don't use a scale or a measurin' cup, ye just give and give, and ye can't give enough—because ye love."

The girl's eyes filled with tears; she tried to speak, but the words choked in her throat.

"It ain't only because yer a sweet, plucky girl that I've loved ye," he went on. "It's because ye make me think of——" there was a break in his voice. "Ye know, we had a little girl once and—we lost her. She was only three years old when she—went away. That ain't very old, is it? But, say, she had the cinches around our hearts all right! I can see her now, in her blue dress, with her little hands full o' flowers. She had eyes like yours, Betty, and a pretty way—like yours and——" the grim, old fellow stopped and wiped his eyes. "Well, I guess ye understand now why I'd do 'most anything in the world to make you happy."

"I've been so foolish, so extravagant," she murmured in distressed self-reproach.

"Not a bit! All I want ye to do is to ease up a few notches until——"

"And you've been hard pressed for money. Oh, if I could only help you! I will help you. I'll work. Yes, I mean it. I can earn money with my singing and—besides, I'm practical. I can use a typewriter—I could be your secretary, Guardy. I'm sure I could. Would you let me try? Please let me."

"Holy cats!" exclaimed Baxter. "Is there anything an American girl won't think of? I'm proud of ye, Betty,

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

fer wantin' to do it, but it ain't necessary. You just stay with us like one of the family."

"No, no! There are too many staying with you like one of the family. I'm going to be your secretary, that is," her face fell, "unless you have one already?"

"I had one in New York, but I didn't bring her over because—the fact is, there was a leak in the office and—I fired her."

"Then you need some one to help you?" cried Betty eagerly. "And I do know about business—at least I can learn and—I can do what I'm told. Please, Guardy."

Betty's whole soul was in the words and, for many a day, Hiram Baxter remembered the loving radiance that illumined her face as she held out her hands in a sweet impulse to help.

"Yer a little thoroughbred, all right," he reflected. "And I could trust ye. That's a whole lot more'n I can say of the last one. Hm!"

He reflected a moment, and then, holding out his hand with a cheery smile: "Betty, yer my kind! Yer Bryce Thompson's daughter! There! I don't mind tellin' ye this fits in with a plan I had and—yes, ye can try it. Ye can be my secretary. Say, won't that shame the relatives?"

Thus they settled upon an arrangement that was destined to have important consequences.

This night they spent in town for the pleasure of a theatre, and the next morning Betty passed in a flutter of hurried preparations, for she suddenly realized that one of her Paquin gowns was not the most suitable garment for a serious-minded secretary to be wearing when she arrived at the scene of her duties. There was no reason why she should give Mrs. Baxter's relatives (who



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

did not know her, thank heaven) the satisfaction of realizing, by any outward sign, how complete was the downfall of poor Betty Thompson. So she hurried into her plainest black frock, a very chic creation, nevertheless, and was waiting demurely in the taxicab when Hiram and his wife appeared.

And now, just as they were starting for the station, there came a long distance telephone message for Baxter, something important, the operator said.

"Who d'ye s'pose it was, Eleanor?" beamed Hiram a few moments later, as he hurried back. "Ye'll have to get a move on, friend," he warned the driver, as they shot away.

"The Baroness Dunwoodie?" guessed Mrs. Baxter.

"The Bishop of Bunchester?" guessed Betty.

"Wrong, both of ye." Then he turned to his wife with a happy smile. "Dearie, it's Bob."

"Bob!" exclaimed the mother.

"Bob Baxter, sure as guns!"

"But Bob is in New York? You left him there?"

"I left him there, but he didn't stay there. He jumped on the *Lusitania* the day after I sailed on the *Olympic* and they nearly beat us in. He came right across from Liverpool and he's up at Ipping House this minute. Wanted to know if he should come to town and I said we were on our way back and to wait where he was."

"My boy!" murmured Mrs. Baxter, and not all the picture hats in Piccadilly could give her the look of joy that her face wore now.

"Seems Bob found trouble in the office that he couldn't write about, so he just came over." The old fellow turned to Betty. "I told ye there was a leak in that New York office."

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

It was not until they were seated in the train that Eleanor was enlightened as to Miss Thompson's new purpose.

"Mr. Baxter's secretary? It's absurd!" she declared.

"Please don't say that, Mrs. Baxter," pleaded Betty. "I've only just found out about—Father and—I couldn't respect myself if I just did nothing and let Mr. Baxter support me."

"There's the American spirit for ye," approved Hiram.

The train rushed on and presently, as happens in railway journeys, the three lapsed into silence. Hiram thought of his business worries and of his plan for solving the problem of the relatives; Eleanor thought of her son, and Betty thought of various things. Poor child, she had enough to think of! What a sad awakening after all her bright dreams! She wondered who would live now in her lovely Paris apartment that would never be hers again. Who would stand of summer evenings, as she had stood so often, on the balcony outside her bedroom and watch the swallows circling over the chestnut trees on the Champs Élysées? Perhaps she would never see Paris again!

Then she thought of Bob Baxter, the playmate of her childhood, whom she had not seen for years and years, not since she was a little thing with yellow braids down her back and freckles on her nose. A homely little thing, they always said. She wondered if Bob remembered her as a homely little thing. Perhaps he did not remember her at all.

She turned toward the fleeing landscape and, in the window, caught the reflection of her own lovely face. Miss Betty Thompson, if you please, a poor dependent, a drudging secretary! It was sickening, maddening; she

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

could not bear it. And then, through the torture of her thoughts, came tripping brightly a whimsical fancy that brought back the laughter to her eyes. And the laughing eyes in the window seemed to say: "How could he possibly remember you?"

"Guardy," she asked softly, "would you do something for me?"

"Sure I would," said Hiram.

"Even if it seems silly—just to make me happy?"

Baxter nodded his big head slowly. "Try me, little girl."

"You said it would shame the relatives—what I am going to do?"

"It will—you bet it will—when they know."

"But I don't want them to know. That's the point. It isn't any snobbish reason. I'm not ashamed of working, but——" She threw all her feminine power into one swift, bewitching appeal. "Guardy, I don't want them to know that I am Betty Thompson. I don't want anyone to know it except you and Mrs. Baxter. Please let me have my way. Let me just be your new secretary, Miss—er—I'll take some other name."

"No, no, I won't stand fer any fake name. Take yer own name. I'll introduce ye as Miss Thompson, my new secretary. They'll never suspect that yer Betty Thompson."

"But some of the relatives will be sure to know you," objected Eleanor.

"The relatives have never seen me," said Betty.

"Bob has seen you."

"Not since I was ten years old—that's eleven years ago. Was I terribly homely, Mrs. Baxter?"

"Well, my dear, you were by no means a beauty."

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

"You certainly have changed," put in Hiram admiringly.

"Thank you, Guardy. Then it's all settled. I'm to be the new secretary, Miss Thompson? Not Miss Thompson, the new secretary—you see, there's a difference. Is it a bargain?" she asked, giving them her two hands, while a mischievous light danced in her eyes. "Is it? You don't mind, do you? I'll work, I'll do anything, but I want your promise that I'm going to be the new secretary, Miss Thompson."

"I give ye my promise," said Baxter, and he held out his big hand, which she first patted affectionately and then hugged in her warm, white palms.

"And you?" Betty turned to Eleanor. "Please! Perhaps we'll only keep it up for a few days?"

"What a tease!" laughed Eleanor. "Very well, Miss Thompson, I give my promise."

And so it was arranged.

It was half-past four when they reached the little station, where guests for Ipping House left the train. Betty's heart beat with excitement and surprise as a splendid looking young fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, came forward to meet them.

"Bob!" "Mother!" "Dad!" came the quick, happy cries and then, after an awkward moment, the young American was presented to Betty.

"Bob, I want ye to know my new secretary, Miss Thompson," said Hiram, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Miss Thompson!"

"Mr. Baxter!"

Their eyes met and that first quick scrutiny brought an impression, a swift sensation that neither ever forgot.

After seeing the ladies comfortably disposed in the tonneau, Hiram climbed into the front seat beside his son and the car, after a preliminary fit of monstrous ague, leaped forward with a dragon-like snort and swiftly rounded the grass-bordered flower-bed where the ambitious station master had spelled the name of Ippingford in sprawling and almost illegible nasturtiums.

A blur of whitish gray varied with deep green and momentary splashes of every possible rose color was all Betty saw of the village street. For a fraction of a second her eyes caught and held the fantastic image of a cat on a swinging sign—A Blue Cat—with golden feet, or were they golden boots? Before her mind had pieced the picture together the little tavern was left far behind. Now they were gliding swiftly and silently, save for the murmur of the motor, through a shimmering twilight of moss-grown beeches and ivy-covered oaks, where high hawthorn hedges shadowed miniature jungles of interlacing leaves and ferns and nestling flowers. Like a blue-green tapestry it shut them in on either side. Only as the car slowed for an instant when rounding a corner could one make out a detail of harebell, foxglove, wild rose, or honeysuckle. It was Betty's first sight of a rambling English lane, and her mind flew back to the stolid French country roads lined with staid, orderly poplars.

"This is mad, quite mad, by comparison," she said to herself, "but exquisitely mad like Ophelia." Then aloud to Mrs. Baxter, as she leaned back: "How cozy they are, these English lanes!"

Now they were speeding down a narrow green alley, where the hawthorn hedges met overhead and the sound was as if they were going through a tunnel. Mrs.

## A SHOCK FOR BETTY

---

Baxter did not hear, but she nodded and smiled to save Betty from the necessity of shouting.

Betty sat directly behind Mr. Baxter at the other side of the car from Bob, and, though she could study him unobserved, she had, after the first shock of meeting, avoided looking at him. She had wanted to be alone—quite, quite alone. She wanted to think it all over, to reconstruct herself, as it were, to adjust herself to this new, this totally unexpected edition of her old playmate. So she had welcomed the distraction of this intoxicating beauty that swam past her in the golden midsummer haze.

If it did not leave her to herself, at least it took her away from this Bob, this disturbing giant, with his broad shoulders bent forward easily in the business of steering, and who now, at last, held her eyes and would not let them go. Not even the wild roses could drag her glance away, and they continued their mad backward race with the foxgloves and ferns and harebells and honeysuckle, all unobserved by Miss Betty Thompson.

And presently she found herself waiting for the moment when he would turn again to speak to his father, when she would once more see his profile. Something Hiram Baxter had just said caused Bob to laugh as he lifted his head, and Betty laughed aloud for sheer sympathy. A moment before Bob had been frowning and, with the heavy Baxter eyebrows and pugnacious jaw, unrelieved by the regularly modeled features of his handsome father, Bob's face in repose only just missed being plain, just missed it, Betty thought, by that miss that is as good as a mile. And now when he laughed every feature, every line of his honest face seemed to collaborate in the expression of irresistible mirth.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

They were turning in at the park gate of Ipping House. For a moment the car came to a standstill, chattering impatiently while a small, apple-faced child, a little girl with reddish hair and wondering eyes, who had watched their approach from the steps of the lodge, swung the iron gate slowly open.

As the car lunged forward again Betty gave a backward look along the shaded roadway. The figure of a young woman in a scarlet cloak, slim, dark, foreign looking, a gypsy, perhaps, was standing in the shadow at a turn of the road watching them intently. The next instant she had disappeared among the trees. It happened so quickly that, as the iron gate clanged behind them, the scarlet of the girl's cloak was all that Betty's mind retained of the instantaneous picture. It was a peculiar shade of scarlet. Where had she seen it before?

## CHAPTER V

### THE REVEREND HORATIO MERLE

**I**N order to make it clear how Hester of the scarlet cloak (for it was she) happened to be waiting at the lodge gate on the evening of Betty Thompson's arrival, we must go back a little and consider the activities of the Reverend Horatio Merle during the previous twenty-four hours.

It was on the morning of the day preceding Hiram Baxter's return and the curate and his wife were lingering over their matutinal repast in the sunny breakfast room of Ipping House. A nice little clerical man, a pink and puffy little woman; he with finely drawn features and thin side whiskers, she with alert, almost domineering, eyes.

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Merle, looking up from the newspaper. "Just listen to this, Horatio!"

"I am listening, my dear," said Horatio, carefully replacing in its Dresden cup the egg which had been doing preliminary duty as a hand warmer, clasped between his devotional palms.

But Harriet Merle with the self-absorption of newspaper monopolists was now reading rapidly half aloud half to herself with tantalizing incoherence—"first-class carriage—inside pocket—five thousand pounds—progressive mothers—thoroughly searched—Bishop of Bunchester."



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"That accounts for it," she said at last, laying down the newspaper. "That explains it," repeated Harriet.

"Explains what? What is it all about?" queried her husband, nervously adjusting his eyeglasses, which magnified to an almost goblin intensity the note of interrogation in his pale blue eyes.

Harriet briefly recapitulated the startling news of the stolen purse, to a running accompaniment of "Tut tut!"—"Bless my soul!"—"Well, I never!" from her astonished spouse, who straightway begged to see the newspaper for himself and, with fascinated interest, studied the details of the robbery.

"Clever piece of work," the curate muttered. "Looks like a high-class crook." And his eyes went off into space.

"A crook? Horatio! What do you mean?"

"Nothing, my dear! Nothing!" he assured her with a guilty look, for the truth was this mild-mannered clergyman adored detective mysteries and in his secret chamber had devoured numbers of them.

"Now you see, Horatio, the bishop will be detained in London over Friday, and as Dr. Dibble is laid up with his throat, that is why the Progressive Mothers have asked you to deliver the address at the opening of the bazaar."

"Dear, dear!" sighed Horatio, ignoring the all-important matter of the address. "Such a large sum, such an incredible sum! Fancy losing anything so huge as five thousand pounds!" he smiled at the thought. "It's like—it's like the musician who lost a bass drum in a hansom cab. Now if it were five shillings, or even five pounds, I could really sympathize; and, speaking of sympathy, Harriet, I think I will go to the rectory this morn-

## THE REVEREND HORATIO MERLE

---

ing and see if there is anything I can do for poor Dr. Dibble."

"You'll do nothing of the kind." Harriet had finished her breakfast and now rose majestically to her full height of five feet three inches (including her marceled pompadour and military heels). "You'll go straight to your room and write your Progressive Mothers' address. You may make light of our poverty and the humiliating dependence it entails on the hospitality of my cousin, Hiram——"

"Second cousin-in-law," gently corrected Horatio.

She swept the interruption aside. "You may even scoff at my relationship to Cousin Eleanor, but you shall not make light of this opportunity. It is not only an honor, Horatio, but there is also a——" Harriet hesitated.

"Honorarium?" suggested her husband.

She nodded. "I don't know how much, but we cannot afford to ignore it, and, besides, there is no knowing what it may lead to. Poor, dear Dr. Dibble must be in his eighties, and another of these attacks——"

Horatio raised a hand in protest. "My dear, I beg of you not to impute such mercenary motives to my anxiety about Dr. Dibble's health."

But Harriet was not listening, she was gazing with an expression of horror at Horatio's outstretched hand.

"Horatio!" she exclaimed.

He examined the back of his two hands, then turned them over and held them out with the air of a schoolboy expecting to be scolded.

"I assure you, my dear, I scrubbed them with all my might, but the water was so cold, so very cold," he shivered at the recollection.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

Harriet shook her head. "It isn't that," she said.

"Then what is it, my dear? This suspense is killing me."

"Your cuffs, Horatio."

Her voice had in it a note of anguish. For the moment all the pitiful makeshifts of the last few months, ever since Horatio resigned from his last pulpit, and their present dependence on the bounty of a distant relative, seemed to find concentrated expression on Horatio's frayed cuffs. Harriet was on the verge of tears.

"Come to your room," she said. "I will get my scissors."

They paused at the first landing of the long oak staircase, Harriet for breath, Horatio for Harriet.

"I wish you thought more of your appearance, Horatio," she panted. "Cousin Hiram, though he is only an American, is so particular about his shirts."

"If I had Cousin Hiram's money I might——"

"No, you wouldn't, Horatio. You'd spend it all on charities and Angora cats and—mechanical toys," she added indignantly.

"And real lace dresses for my old Dutch," laughed Horatio, putting his arm around her, "and satin slippers like the Countess Kate's."

"The countess!" snapped Harriet.

Horatio felt her shrug of aversion at the mention of Kate Clendennin's name. He knew what Harriet was thinking, knew what she would say if she spoke. Kate had something no woman of forty-nine can forgive: she had youth. Kate had other things equally unforgivable, things that went with youth and satin slippers, and a title—a title after all is a title even if it is only a German title, and Harriet classed German titles in a vague cate-

## THE REVEREND HORATIO MERLE

---

---

gory with German silver, German measles, cousins German, and—Germans!

"They're coming now," said Horatio, interrupting her thoughts.

"What? Who?"

"The satin slippers," he repeated in a stage whisper and pointed upward. His choice of words moved even Harriet to reluctant mirth, for the countess had put on heavy walking boots, and the sound of them now descending the uncarpeted oak stairs was anything but satin.

Kate Clendennin paused a moment in her downward flight to exchange the usual morning insincerities. She was a splendid specimen of British young womanhood, with her dark, well-behaved hair and gray-green eyes, capitably set off by a gray tweed walking suit. Harriet regarded her resentfully. What right had Kate to the complexion of an early riser when she always breakfasted in bed, and to the figure of Artemis when she never set foot to the ground if there were a horse or an automobile in sight?

"Ah! I hope you slept well," said Mrs. Merle.

The countess smothered a yawn with a tan glove. "I really don't know; I'm not awake yet." She was thinking, "What an odd little couple they are, these two, this pink-and-white cockatoo lady in the faded purple morning gown, and this little gray mouse in the black velvet coat."

"Is Mr. Fitz Brown down yet?" they heard her call to Parker a moment later, as she disappeared into the breakfast room. "Tell Anton we shall want the motor."

"It's perfectly shameful the way those two abuse dear Cousin Hiram's kindness," grumbled Harriet. "They've had the car every day this week."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

The Merles were now standing in Horatio's study near a window overlooking the conservatory. For a moment there was silence, broken only by the gnashing of the tiny scissors. The operation of cuff trimming is a delicate one, requiring skill and steadiness of hand. The deviation of a thread's breadth by those sharp little scissors might be fatal to the cuff, might even endanger the life of the shirt.

"I have always maintained," the curate remarked, "that surgery is a science for which women are by nature peculiarly——"

"The other hand, please," interrupted Harriet shortly.

She was annoyed by Horatio's avoidance of her pet subject of discussion. It was his cue here to say: "If Lionel and Kate abuse Cousin Hiram's hospitality, why, so do we." To which she would reply: "That is different, Horatio; we are relatives of Eleanor Baxter." And he would say: "So are they, Harriet." And she would answer, contemptuously: "They are third cousins." Then Horatio would say: "Yes?" He had a particularly irritating way of saying "Yes?" And, if Harriet weathered this irritation sufficiently to answer she would generally sweep out of the discussion with, "You know perfectly well, Horatio, that people like the Baxters consider being second cousins to such a family as mine a very close relationship."

In her secret heart Harriet knew that Horatio was right, but she had never admitted it and never would. There was no knowing how Horatio would follow up such a victory. Suppose he insisted on their bringing their visit to an end. It was not to be thought of! Their money was all gone, they had no other relatives. What would become of them?

## THE REVEREND HORATIO MERLE

---

"There!" she said at length, surveying the completed cuff. "That's better. Now you must get to work on the address."

Harriet replaced the scissors in a silver sheath that hung from her chatelaine at her side. At the door she turned with a look the curate knew well. "You will find everything you need, Horatio, and I will see that you are not disturbed."

The door closed with a subdued but ominous after-click. Horatio stood listening until the sound of his wife's footsteps had died away, then, tiptoeing quietly across the floor, he turned the knob cautiously and pulled. Alas! There was no mistake. Harriet had locked him in. He was a prisoner in his own room.

"Strange," he reflected, "that the change of only a quarter of an inch in the position of a minute piece of metal in a door should transform into a gloomy dungeon cell what, only one moment before, was a comfortable study, with its inviting easy chair, its reposeful sofa, and——"

He looked quickly, smitten by a sudden dread. It was as he feared—the easy chair was gone, the sofa, too, had been taken away, and there, grimly awaiting him on the table, were a solemn row of dark policeman-like books, Cruden's "Concordance," Roget's "Thesaurus," the "Dictionary of Phrase and Fable," Philpot's "Elements of Rhetoric" and Veighley's "Mythology." In the shadow of these and other cheerful volumes stood a bronze ink-stand of mournful Egyptian architecture, and exactly at right angles to this lay a quire of blue ruled sermon paper. Parallel to the paper rested a pen of shiny black and, as Horatio soon ascertained, evil tasting wood.

"Ptht!!" he exclaimed suddenly, after some minutes

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

of violent concentration on the subject of Progressive Mothers. "Why doesn't Edison invent a penholder of some edible material?"

And now the curate's thoughts wandered back to the mystery of the bishop's purse. Who could have taken it? There were two women in the railway carriage and two musicians. Horatio much preferred crimes with a woman at the bottom and he disliked musicians, so he decided that one of these fair travelers—of course, they were fair—had turned the trick. He loved the crisp vulgarity of that expression—turned the trick. And, forthwith, he loosed his fancy over the paths of fearless adventure that he loved to tread. Now he was a great detective, on the track of a desperate criminal, and his gentle soul thrilled in the conflict of plot and counterplot. In all literature and theology there was nothing that stirred Horatio Merle like these imaginings.

Half an hour later, Harriet, listening at the study door, heard a faint scratching sound and smiled in satisfaction.

"He's writing," she said to herself and stole swiftly away. She had an errand in the village and could leave now with a clear conscience.

The scratching sound continued. It came, however, not from the writing table, but from the window casement, which presently swung open, apparently of its own accord. Whereupon Horatio came back, with a start, from his heroic wanderings, back to the world of drab reality and looked blinkingly about him. There, on the window ledge, sharply silhouetted against the wistaria leaves, stood Martin Luther. His tail swayed swiftly from side to side like the ebony baton of a chef d'orchestre. His staring eyes were like two circular

## THE REVEREND HORATIO MERLE

---

holes through which you saw the green of the leafy background. He held his head proudly, he was carrying something. Horatio shut his eyes quickly. There were moments when he hated Martin Luther.

When he looked again the cat was standing by his chair purring noisily to attract attention to something that lay on the floor. It was a field mouse, just such a one as he had watched in the cornfield the day before and had scolded Martin Luther for frightening. Perhaps it was the same field mouse.

"You little murderer!" cried Merle. "It would serve you right if I had left you to drown in the canal!"

He pushed the cat away roughly and picked up the unconscious little creature. The field mouse stirred in his hand. Merle examined it tenderly and was surprised to find it apparently quite uninjured. He stroked it gently with his finger. Suddenly the mouse sat up and began preening itself with an incredibly rapid whirring movement of its tiny hands. Then just as suddenly the movements stopped, the little head drooped, and the eyes closed.

"Poor little thing!" said Horatio. "The shock was too much for it."

He had scarcely uttered these words when the mouse opened its eyes again and went on preening itself as if nothing had happened.

"You're sleepy, that's what's the matter with you," decided Merle, after watching several repetitions of this performance. "I'm going to take you home and put you to bed. As for you, Martin Luther," he turned severely to the cat, "you are a disgrace to the family and deserve to be excommunicated."

Martin Luther, after a stare of pained incredulity,



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

walked stiffly to the farthest corner of the room and, turning his back on the curate, signified with silent and elaborate symbolism that he washed his hands and feet of the whole matter.

And now the Reverend Horatio, mindless of difficulties and dangers, set about keeping his rash promise to return the field mouse to its sorrowing relatives. First he tried the door in the vain hope that Harriet had secretly relented and unlocked it. No such luck. The window was his only means of exit. Very well, he would exit by the window. The thought of failing to keep his word never entered his head.

Looking out of the window, the kindly gentleman studied the situation with scientific mind. Three feet below was the glass roof of the conservatory, which was not more than eight feet wide at this point and curved downward like the brink of a glass waterfall. At its outer edge there was a drop of perhaps six feet to the driveway.

One thing the curate, leaning out, noted with joy. A little to the right, just where the conservatory rounded the corner of the house and the supporting girder was of a greater width the wistaria took an unexpected turn and spanned the dome of glass with a network of rope-like branches that covered it in some places to the width of a foot. It was as if the friendly tree had miraculously gone out of its way to help him. To Merle's imagination this seemed like a sign of providential approval.

There still remained the disposition of the field mouse, but this offered only a momentary difficulty. The solution was found in a bag cleverly improvised from the curate's silk handkerchief, the ends gathered together, dumpling-wise, and secured by the string of his eyeglass

## THE REVEREND HORATIO MERLE

---

ached for the purpose. And, thus enveloped, the creature was safely and comfortably suspended (as a princess swung in a Sedan chair) from the top of Horatio's black coat. This arrangement left the curate's hands free for climbing.

Having assured himself that the combined strength of the branches and the glass would bear his weight, Horatio proceeded with the descent and found this perfectly safe; but just as he had reached the jumping-off place, the curate was brought to a palpitating halt by the sound of steps in the conservatory beneath him. Parting the ivy leaves and peering downward through the glass he saw Anton, the chauffeur, moving among the plants in the direction of the library.

"What's he doing there, I wonder?" thought Merle. "That business has Anton in the conservatory?"

As he came directly underneath the spot where Horatio was crouching, the chauffeur stood still and looked at him cautiously. Apparently satisfied that he was not observed, he pulled a blue-and-white envelope from his pocket, and, skillfully loosening the flap, took out a paper which, as he held it scarcely two feet below him, Merle could see was a cablegram. After a glance at the contents, Anton replaced the paper in its envelope and quickly retraced his steps toward the library.

It all happened so quickly that, even had Merle tried to read the cable, he could not have done so. Some figures and the word "Gramercy" caught his eye. Then, he looked away, the humorous appropriateness of the man eavesdropper to his position on the roof caused him to laugh aloud. It was fortunate for the Reverend Horatio that Anton was out of hearing, more fortunate in the gentle curate dreamed.

## CHAPTER VI

### HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK

**G**REAT was the rejoicing in the home of the field mouse on the return of the prodigal. Merle, happy in the success of his mission, watched the little fellow scamper off among the barley stalks and made no attempt to follow his course or intrude upon the welcoming festivities.

His errand of mercy accomplished, the curate's path of duty now led directly back to Ipping House, back to the prison cell where Roget and Cruden and all the police platoon of beetle-colored books and the funereal inkstand and the penholder of evil tasting wood grimly awaited him. A straight and narrow path between the high hedge and cornfields, over the meadow, across the old stone bridge, down the lane to the park gate on the Ippingford road—all to be drearily retraced. In the opposite direction lay a new and untrod path, a woodland way that whispered invitingly with mysterious dark-nesses and possibilities of adventure.

The process of reasoning by which the Reverend Horatio Merle convinced himself that a woodland path, starting in exactly the opposite direction was a short cut to Ipping House was anything but satisfactory when he afterward attempted to reveal it to Mrs. Merle. Indeed, but for the ready tact of Martin Luther on this occasion, he would have been left entirely without an audience,

## HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK

---

---

as, in the middle of his explanation, the door was slammed indignantly by the departing Harriet.

"In any case," he told himself, as he turned his back upon the cornfield, "I can think about Progressive Mothers just as well in this wood as I can shut up in my study."

Strange to relate, that was the last thought on the subject of Progressive Mothers that visited the curate for many hours. It was as if the spirit of the wood had overheard his rash boast and summoned all its forces to teach Horatio a lesson. Never was there such a conspiracy. With one accord birds, trees, flowers, butterflies, and all the creeping things of the wood united to compass the downfall of Horatio Merle. His surrender was complete and, from the moment of his entrance into the wood, the all-important matter of the address passed completely from the clergyman's mind. The Bishop of Bunchester was right when he said that Merle was a born naturalist.

At the end of two hours Horatio sat down to rest on the bank of a rocky brook, tired and happy, without the least idea where he was. His hat was gone, his feet were wet through, owing to the treachery of a moss-covered stone, and his coat was torn and smeared with leaf mold. Earlier in his wanderings the joyful curate had fallen into a deep saw-pit concealed by tall bracken and he bore upon his person the marks of his struggles to extricate himself.

Merle looked at his watch. The hands pointed to a quarter past one, indicating to Horatio that it was exactly five minutes to two. The original walk from Ipping House to the cornfield had taken him fifteen minutes, and this was the short cut home!

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

What would Harriet think? The thought of what Harriet would think brought Harriet's husband to his feet and approximately to his senses. The first rational idea since his unhappy inspiration of the short cut now came to him. He would follow the brook. "A brook can't go round in a circle, so it must lead somewhere," he reasoned, "and anywhere is better than nowhere."

Comforted by this logic, Horatio followed the course of the brook. If it did not go in a circle, there were times when Merle was not sure whether it was the same brook or another one going in the opposite direction.

"It must go somewhere," he repeated firmly when, for the second time, he passed the chimney of a ruined paper mill he had left behind several minutes before. And, sure enough, another turn of the brook brought him to the edge of the wood. Here the brook surpassed all its previous feats of contortion and doubled back, growling and grumbling, as if to say it had come miles out of its way and missed an appointment with a most important river, all on account of an absent-minded curate.

Emerging from the wood and descending a steep bank, Merle found himself in a narrow lane which he recognized as a tributary of the Ippingford road. On the other side of the lane at the top of the bank was a thick hedge which formed one of the boundaries of the Millbrook golf course. Here the wanderer had a choice of two ways. The lane, though a trifle the longer, was easier walking than the golf course. On the other hand, it was the more frequented, the golf course at this season being often quite deserted, which was an important consideration in Horatio's hatless and earth-stained condition.

## HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK

---

The sound of a distant auto horn decided the wavering curate and he scrambled up the bank, trusting to luck to find an opening in the hedge. The only opening provided by the playful goblin who was conducting Merle's fortunes was scarcely more than a thinness, but Horatio plunged into it, appalled by the thought that Harriet might be in the approaching vehicle. She sometimes went for a ride with the Winkles in their big car, and if Harriet should see him now, if anyone should see him now!

As the automobile shot past, Merle crouched motionless, safely obliterated by the hedge whose color scheme matched his own. Then, as he tried to push on through the branches, he was suddenly restrained, not by ordinary thorns, but by the uncompromising pull of a rope of barbed wire that formed an extra barrier along the top of the hedge and that now had hooked itself firmly into Horatio's coat. Squirm and struggle as he would, the agitated naturalist could not free himself, and, to make matters worse, as he reached his left leg forward and tried to brace himself for a better pull by digging his boot into the turf of the golf course, he felt his toe violently caught in a fierce grip and so powerfully held that he was now literally anchored in the middle of the hedge, unable to move a single inch forward by reason of the cruel barbed wire or a single inch backward on account of whatever savage creature had seized his extended toe—a most painful and embarrassing position for this kindly Christian gentleman!

Horatio's first effort was to get rid of the animal that was holding his left foot. It must be a dog, he reasoned, yet it was strange that he had heard no growl. What else but a dog could it be? He peered through the

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

branches, but could distinguish nothing except the green of the turf.

"Whoa, doggy! Good boy!" he called out caressingly, at the same time trying discreetly to withdraw his leg; but the grip held firmly.

"A most extraordinarily steady dog," reflected Merle. "And a silent dog." He wondered if it was possible that he had been bitten by a canine deaf mute. There was no question that he had been bitten by something, for he could feel the teeth on the toe of his boot.

At this moment Horatio was conscious of footsteps approaching along the path outside the hedge and, screwing his head around, he made out the figure of a woman in a brilliant red cloak. There was no longer any question of concealment. He must get out of this painful position and, in his most conciliatory tone, he addressed the lady from the depths of the hedge.

"My dear madam, I regret exceedingly the necessity that compels me——"

"Oh!" cried the lady, and Merle observed that the scarlet cloak had stopped, while a pair of lustrous, dark eyes gazed suspiciously in his direction. "Don't be alarmed, my friend," he begged. "I wish you no harm. On the contrary, I need help. The fact is, some animal, a dog, I think, has hold of my left foot."

"A dog!" exclaimed the other, stepping back.

"He won't hurt you," said Merle reassuringly. "He's on the other side of the hedge. Can you see him, my dear?"

Encouraged by these words, the lady, now seen by Merle to be young and dark and decidedly good looking (although plainly dressed), drew nearer to the mysterious voice and was presently searching among the leaves

## HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK

---

and branches for an explanation of this singular summons.

"I don't see anything," she said.

"Perhaps if you threw a stone, or—could you go through the hedge? You see, I am caught on this barbed wire."

"Wait! It's your coat sleeve," exclaimed the young woman. "There!" and with a quick turn of her hand she released the impaled garment.

"Thank you," he murmured. "Be careful of the dog! I'm going at him now. Hey, there! Good heaven!"

As he spoke Horatio, loosed from the restraining wire, stumbled on through the hedge, while the young woman stared apprehensively after him. There was a clank of metal, a few muttered words, and then Merle came struggling back, scratched, torn, and panting, but full of eager interest.

"What do you suppose had hold of my toe?" he burst out.

For a moment Hester (for it was she) surveyed him in silence, then she let herself go in a fit of uncontrollable laughter, while Merle looked at her in pained surprise.

"But it's true," he insisted, "something did have hold of my toe. It wasn't a dog, but—look! You can see where its tooth went through my boot. It's lucky I wear long ones, isn't it? Otherwise it might have gone through my foot. Do you see?"

"Yes, sir, I see," answered the girl, checking her hilarity as she recognized, in spite of his battered condition, a wearer of the cloth. And, sure enough, there in the toe of his left boot was a small, round hole to which the curate pointed proudly.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"You couldn't possibly guess what made that hole," he declared, "not in a hundred guesses, so I'll tell you. It was a mole trap. Fancy that! You know, they set them on the golf course and I poked my toe right into one. A mole trap, of all things!" Then, glancing anxiously at his watch, "Half past three! Bless my soul! I can't possibly get back to Ipping House before four o'clock."

At the mention of Ipping House the Storm girl looked at him with startled interest and forthwith her whole manner changed.

"Is that where you live?" she asked.

"That's where I am visiting," answered Merle, and his face clouded as he thought of Harriet. "Ah, well, we must make the best of it," he sighed. "That little field mouse is happy and—my dear young lady, I cannot express to you my gratitude for the admirable way in which you came to my rescue."

"Oh, that's all right."

"Allow me to present myself. I am the Reverend Horatio Merle. I judge by your appearance and—er—accent that you are a stranger in this region?"

"Yes," answered Hester, with a quiver of hesitation, "I—I just got off the train."

Horatio was immediately interested. "The train from London?"

"Yes. I was never here before and——" the pathetic note sounded in her rich, low voice, "I'll be very grateful, sir, if you will advise me where to go."

"Why—haven't you friends in Ippingford?" asked Horatio in surprise.

The girl shook her head and her dark eyes rested on the curate with such an expression of sadness and sweet resignation that he felt inexpressibly touched.

## HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK

---

"My dear young lady," he said in ready sympathy, "my dear Miss—er——" he paused to give her an opportunity to tell him her name, but this was precisely what the adroit young woman was not yet prepared to do. She was not sure what name to give him.

Miss Thompson knew her as Jenny Regan, the name she had given to the police, and it was in pursuit of Miss Thompson (and her golf bag) that she had come to Ippingford. On the other hand, various newspapers had chronicled the fact that a young woman named Jenny Regan was implicated in the robbery of the bishop's purse, and to give that name here might make trouble for her. And yet if she gave her real name, Hester Storm, what would Miss Thompson think?

"I have had such a hard time, especially this last year," she murmured, avoiding the difficulty.

"You must tell me all about it," said the curate kindly. "Come—as we walk along—all about it."

So it befell that Hester Storm, having started out aimlessly along a country road, her mind filled with schemes for getting at Miss Elizabeth Thompson, had, by a lucky chance, fallen in with this guileless and amiable party who actually lived at Ipping House and who might be of the greatest use to her.

As they strolled on, side by side, the girl elaborated for Horatio's benefit the same hard luck story that she had invented for Betty on the train, the same nursery governess struggles, the same disappointments and humiliations, only she did the thing much better for Horatio, having had more practice, and, as she finished, the curate's eyes were filled with tears.

"My dear young lady, I am inexpressibly touched by your misfortunes, believe me, I am deeply affected."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

The intensity of his emotion, as he spoke these words, caused the reverend gentleman to open his pale blue eyes very wide (and his powerful glasses magnified them still farther) so that Hester thought of him suddenly as a strange, blue-eyed owl bending over her and, to hide her merriment, was forced to turn away.

"Look at that queer old girl coming down the road," she tittered, feeling that she must laugh at something.

"Queer old girl!" repeated Horatio, focusing his vision in this new direction. "Why, bless my soul, it's Harriet!"

A moment later Mrs. Merle joined them, stern of aspect, a female inquisitor, with power of life or death, her husband felt, over wayward though well meaning naturalists.

"Horatio!" breathed the lady, and that one word held such depths of scorn and menace that the curate never again doubted the possibility of eternal punishment.

"My dear Harriet," he began weakly, but she cut him short.

"Who is this person?" she demanded, with a freezing glance at Hester.

Then came Horatio's great moment when, inspired with the courage of despair, he rallied against the breaking storm and, for once in his life, as Hiram Baxter would have expressed it, played Harriet to a standstill. Not one instant did he give his wife to press her attack, not one word of explanation or apology did he vouchsafe, but, by a masterly use of the feminine method, he put the astounded lady at once on the defensive, then held her there with admirable strategy, then drove her back, point by point, until she was utterly and ignominiously vanquished.

"I have just been in great peril, my dear," he answered gravely. "In my stained and disordered garments you may see evidence of the—er—struggle."

"The struggle? Horatio? You have been attacked?" his wife cried in alarm.

Realizing the value of this suggestion and gaining confidence with every word, the curate continued, facing Harriet almost sternly now.

"You may see for yourself, my dear, where the weapon penetrated."

"The weapon? Oh, Horatio!" She trembled.

With accusing forefinger, as if Harriet herself were to blame, the curate pointed to the sinister hole in his boot. "There!" he said. "And if this young lady had not rushed to my assistance with a courage and resourcefulness that I have rarely seen equaled——" he paused to control his emotion, while Mrs. Merle wrung her hands in distress.

"I have been so hasty, so inconsiderate," she wailed. "I shall never forgive myself. And you, my dear young lady," she turned her brimming eyes to Hester, whose face was averted, "what must you think of me? Horatio, introduce us," she whispered.

"Certainly, my dear, this is my young friend, Miss—er——"

Then the adventuress decided. "Miss Hester Storm," she said simply and, with her wonderful, wistful smile, she held out her hand to Mrs. Merle.

"I'm sure I'm very grateful for what you've done, Miss Storm," said Harriet graciously.

And presently these three, such was the effectiveness of Merle's new diplomacy, were walking on most amiably toward Ipping House, the subject of conversation

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

being the wrongs suffered by Hester in a thankless world and the obligation of the Merles to now, in some measure, relieve these wrongs. It may be added that never, to the end of her days, did Harriet Merle fully and clearly grasp the details of the terrible danger from which this dark-eyed damsel had saved her husband.

As a turn in the road brought into view the tiny gable of the gray stone lodge of Ipping House, Harriet saw an opportunity to prove the genuineness of her penitence and gratitude.

"I have it," she exclaimed with a pleased look. "The very thing, Horatio!"

"What, my dear?"

"Old Mrs. Pottle!"

"You mean——" he glanced benevolently at Hester.

"I mean that Miss Storm has no place to go in Ippingford, no friends except ourselves and—there are two spare rooms at the lodge. I am sure Cousin Hiram would have no objections, and poor Mrs. Pottle needs some one to help her. Would you mind helping at the lodge, my dear?"

"No, indeed," answered Hester sweetly. "I am only too glad to help. It's so kind of you and your husband to give me the opportunity."

Thus it came about that, on the following evening, Hester of the scarlet cloak was watching eagerly near the lodge when Hiram Baxter's big automobile swung in through the gate and moved swiftly up the drive with a musical murmur of its smooth running engine. On the back seat was Miss Elizabeth Thompson, and Hester thrilled with excitement as she recognized the fair American, the lady of the golf bag. Here was her chance, her



## HESTER OF THE SCARLET CLOAK

---

---

great chance, but—she had one misgiving. Miss Thompson knew her as Jenny Regan, and now she had given the curate and his wife her real name, Hester Storm.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEW SECRETARY

**H**ESTER'S problem was exceedingly simple; she wanted two or three minutes alone with Miss Thompson's golf bag. That was all she asked of fortune, two or three minutes; and, for the accomplishment of this purpose she had summoned all her wits and all her daring. Easy enough to talk about keeping straight, but if you happened to be a girl who knew where \$25,000 was lying in wait for some one to pick it up and were the only person in the world who had a line on this pleasant bunch of money—say, what was the use of arguing? She had made the break and would see the thing through. It wasn't every well-meaning citizen who could land a fortune by putting in a little time chasing a golf bag!

Meantime, while this dark-eyed schemer waited for a chance to ravish the beautiful bank notes from their unsuspected hiding place, Betty Thompson, all unconscious of Hester's presence, was going through agitated hours in the little mezzanine chamber opening off the library that she had chosen for her bedroom, partly on account of its appropriate situation for a secretary and chiefly because of its quaint unusualness. At the first glance her fancy had been taken by the odd little staircase that curved up in a corner of the big room to a narrow door high in the paneled oak wall. For the rest it

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

---

was a plain, convent-like chamber with whitewashed walls and one small window opening, like that of Horatio's study, over the roof of the conservatory.

Little it mattered to Betty whether her room was large or small and whether its furnishings were sumptuous or simple. She had more important things to think of, poor child, and a problem to face that required all her fortitude. Here were the hopes and dreams of her life rudely shattered and her whole outlook changed in a moment. Instead of being rich, as she had always thought herself, with a fortune that meant freedom, pleasure, everything, it now appeared that she was a poor girl with a burden of debt and must work for her living. She who had never learned to work and who hated drudgery, who had often asked herself how shop girls and office girls could possibly endure their dull existence, now she must work for her living! No wonder Miss Betty Thompson tossed sleepless and wretched and tearful through most of this first night at Ipping House, after a forlorn dinner sent to her room, under plea of headache, and then scarcely touched.

It was late the next morning when Mrs. Baxter knocked at Betty's door and entered with brisk salutations. Was the headache better? Yes, thanks, it was. And would the new secretary have breakfast in bed? The new secretary laughed and admitted that, for this *once*, she would very much enjoy some coffee and toast in bed, nothing else, please; and she assured Mrs. Baxter that never again would she be so neglectful of her duties. What must Mr. Baxter think of her?

"Mr. Baxter went into town on the early train," answered Eleanor reassuringly, "so don't disturb yourself. I think he left some papers for you with Bob."



"Oh!" said Betty, and she recalled, with a thrill of pleasure, the tall, clean-cut, young American who had met them at the station. Nice eyes had little Bobby, who was now big Bobby! Very nice eyes! And rather good shoulders! Extremely good shoulders! Must have been an athlete at college—rowed on the crew and that sort of thing. She would ask him. Stop, she would do nothing of the sort! She mustn't ask personal questions or think of him as Bobby. He was Mr. Robert Baxter, a very serious person with papers for her to copy, and she was—she was the new secretary!

Strange to say, this thought that in the night had brought such gloom came now to Betty as a matter of amused contemplation. Mr. Robert Baxter! Ahem! And more than once, while she carefully dressed, the American girl flashed mischievous and approving smiles into the glass out of her deep, blue eyes and, when, shortly after ten, she descended to the library by her little winding stairs, she was as fresh and lovely a vision of a fair young woman as one would wish to see, quite in spirit with the pleasant sunshine flooding the park and the blackbirds rejoicing in the beeches. Miss Thompson's buoyant youth and sense of humor had come to the rescue.

A glance showed her that the library was empty and she spent some moments enjoying the dignity of this long, spacious room that was to be the scene of her labors. Those old carved oak panels of the napkin pattern, how she loved them! And the Elizabethan ceiling and the tall, deep windows opening on the conservatory! Surely the very last place where one would expect to find the desk of a hustling American man of business. Yet there it was, waiting for Betty to begin, not a roll-

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

desk, thank heaven, but an antique piece of curious  
ornament and richly inlaid standing near one of the great  
chests and now heaped with a pile of mail for Hiram  
Baxter that had accumulated since his sailing from New

A little distance from this desk was a long, narrow  
table, also carved, but of a later period, with a standard  
lamp at one end and a typewriter at the other, while  
between these were rows of neatly arranged papers,  
envelopes, and reports. On top of the typewriter lay a  
sheet of paper, on which the new secretary read a  
pencil message to herself:

"Dear Miss Thompson," began the message. "Father  
gone to town. You will find some correspondence  
on the other desk that he wants you to look over. Please  
make a little abstract of who wrote the letters and what  
they are about. I'll be in shortly and explain. Yours  
R. BAXTER."

Betty was with mingled emotions that Betty read this note.  
"Dear Miss Thompson!" There it was in black and  
white! And, having seen it, she did not particularly  
like it. Nor the cool way in which Bobby Baxter gave  
orders! He would be back shortly to explain. In-  
deed! R. Baxter would be back shortly. Very well!  
When R. Baxter came back she would show R. Baxter  
and she could be just as stiff and business-like as he was.  
Sitting herself at the desk, Betty began with the let-  
ters, looking up from time to time to enjoy the changing  
views of the conservatory that shimmered in through the  
divided window panes. And presently she smiled at her  
own annoyance. Why shouldn't Bob be stiff and  
business-like? It was all her doing and it was too late  
to draw back and— Here was a task that she

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

had given herself, a sort of penance that would show how deeply she realized her great obligation to Mr. Baxter. She had set out to be the new secretary, and, in spite of Mr. Baxter, with his eyes and his shoulders, in spite of annoyances or humiliations, she would be the new secretary.

Thus resolved, Betty threw herself zealously into her work and presently brought such a spirit of intense modern activity into this ancient and solemn room that the row of ancestors in their dull frames above the picture gallery looked down in faded astonishment at this vivacious, self-reliant, American girl bending busily over her desk by the window.

So absorbed was the new secretary in these duties that she did not hear a quick step in the conservatory or the opening of the farther French window as Bob Baxter, glowing with health after a brisk walk, stepped into the library. He paused at the sight of Betty and waited smiling, for her to look up, which she presently did with a startled "Oh!"

"I beg your pardon," he said presently. "I see you are on the job, Miss Thompson."

"Yes," she said briefly, wondering if this was a sarcastic reference to her late appearance.

"I've just been for a walk around the pond. They call it a lake, I'm told." He settled himself comfortably on a fat blue davenport that offered its ample hospitality just beyond the typewriter.

"Do they?" she replied, scarcely looking up.

"Why, yes."

She faced him now and decided that he had not meant to be sarcastic. And he was good looking. How could she have thought him plain the night before? It was

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

---

such a relief to see a man clean shaven after those hideous mustaches and scraggly beards in Paris!

Then she resumed her work, while the object of her approval picked up a newspaper listlessly, and for several minutes there was no sound in the library save the rustle of sheets. Then suddenly Bob's expression changed to one of absorbed interest.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Robbery in a railway carriage!! Five thousand pounds! That's \$25,000! Why, he's a friend of father's! He visited us in New York!"

Betty looked up quickly. "You mean the Bishop of Bunchester?"

"Oh, you've read it?"

"No, no—that is, I mean it happened two days ago. Are there any developments?"

"It seems they have a new clew." Then he read aloud: "Among papers left by the suspected woman, Jenny Regan, at her lodgings on Fulham Road, was the visiting card of a young American lady whose name——" he paused to turn over the page.

"Yes?" she asked eagerly.

"Whose name," he went on, "is withheld by the police in the hope that it may aid in discovering the criminal."

"How could it aid in discovering the criminal?" she questioned.

"Oh, they have detectives on the case."

"Detectives! Really!" and, with a thrill of excitement, Betty once more busied herself with her work, while Bob continued his reading, glancing from time to time in the direction of the new secretary. What an interesting face! And such hands! A lady's hands! An artist's

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

hands! Where in the world had the old gentleman discovered this girl?

"I suppose my father found you in London?" he asked presently.

"Yes," she replied, and he noticed her low pleasant voice and admired the rippling mass of her glossy brown hair as it lifted from her white neck. Here was a stenographer, he reflected, with the well-groomed look of a thoroughbred. The old gentleman certainly was a wonder!

Bob wanted to keep her talking, but could think of nothing in particular to say. Queer how this girl put him ill at ease. And why should he wish to keep her talking, anyway? His dealings with stenographers had always been on a basis of calmest and most business-like indifference, but somehow this one affected him strangely; she "rattled" him.

"Do you take rapid dictation, Miss Thompson?" he finally ventured.

Betty hesitated a moment and her heart sank as she thought of her limitations at the machine. When she had told Hiram Baxter that she could work a typewriter she was speaking from the standpoint of an amateur who had taken the thing up largely as a diversion.

"You mean in shorthand? No, I don't; I'm not a stenographer."

Young Baxter looked at her in surprise. "Not a stenographer?"

"I take dictation direct to the machine," she explained. "Mr. Baxter thinks there are qualities in a private secretary that may be more important than the ability to take rapid dictation."

Bob nodded wisely. "I see. I guess Father told you

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

---

about the—er—trouble he had with his last secretary?"

"You mean the leak in the New York office?" said Betty quickly.

Bob lowered his voice. "That's what I mean. You'll have to be very careful in this position, Miss Thompson. We're in a fight with the big copper trust and Father has enemies, people who are watching every move he makes and are doing their best to ruin him. That's why Dad went to town this morning. That's why I jumped on a quick steamer the day after he sailed from New York. I heard of things that——" he looked about him cautiously, "that I wouldn't trust in the mails."

"You suspect some one—here?" she whispered.

"I don't know, but—I want you to keep your eyes open. The market has been strong lately and we've been buying Independent copper all the way up the line. Ten points more will let us out even, but——" he stopped short as a man's figure passed through the conservatory. It was Anton, the chauffeur.

"What is it, Anton?" he called.

A man with a twisted nose and a shock of black hair appeared at the French window and touched his cap politely. "Looking for a wrench, sir. I'm fixing up the runabout."

"Where's the car?"

"The countess and Mr. Fitz-Brown are out in the car, sir."

"Oh!" said Bob, whereupon the chauffeur, with another salute and a keen glance at the new secretary, withdrew.

"Mr. Baxter," inquired Betty, "isn't there a great risk in buying stock when you don't really pay for it?"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

"You mean on a margin? Of course there's a risk. That's what keeps us worried."

"Then—why do you do it?"

"We can't help it."

"Why?"

"You see, Father inherited this fight from his partner. He's dead. It's a long story. Dad will be sure to tell you some day."

Betty burned with eagerness to hear this story, to know more about her father, yet she dared not press her questions, and suddenly Bob became silent. Then, as if restless, he rose from the davenport and strolled over to one of the windows, then turned again, toying with a cigarette case.

"Do you mind?" he asked politely, indicating the silver box.

"No, I like it," she said. It was evident that he had no intention of going and she must begin this copying if she was ever to get it finished. The time had come when she must demonstrate her ability to use the keys. So, gathering up a pile of letters, she moved resolutely over to the typewriter.

"This machine is very dusty," she decided, after a preliminary examination. "Here's a brush to clean the keys, but—do you suppose I could have a little olive oil?" she asked.

"Why, certainly, I'll get you some," and he hurried off, thus giving Betty a few minutes for preliminary practice. Fortunately, the keyboard was the one she knew already and she soon found, to her great relief, that she could do the work fairly well.

When Bob returned with the oil Betty thanked him sweetly and then, while she fussed with the levers,

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

managed tactfully to turn the conversation back to Mr. Baxter's partner. And presently she learned the sickening truth that Hiram Baxter's present difficulties were entirely due to the fact that her father had been led into speculation.

"It was the old story, Miss Thompson; he thought he could pull a fortune out of the market, but——" Bob shrugged his shoulders.

"He lost?"

"Lost his money and a lot of Father's. They had been partners for twenty-odd years, did a nice conservative banking business until this thing happened."

"Oh! Oh!!" murmured the unhappy girl. "Why did he do it?"

"The same old reason. They always lived in a rather large way. The old man had a daughter, an only child, and—he just worshiped her, lavished things on her. I'd have done the same, for she's a corking fine girl, Betty is, only—it took a lot of money and—Betty wanted to live in Paris and—oh, well, you understand."

"You mean she was extravagant?"

"Generous—extravagant—it comes to the same thing, and the old gentleman wanted to leave her so she could live as she pleased, but—he didn't do it."

Bob had risen again and stood leaning against one of the stiff-backed chairs, blowing cigarette smoke thoughtfully toward the conservatory. For a few moments Betty could scarcely trust herself to speak.

"And the girl—Betty—what became of her?" she asked presently.

"Oh, she's over in Paris, I believe. She doesn't know a word of this. I'm only telling you as Father's private



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

secretary and—you understand this is absolutely confidential, Miss Thompson?"

"Of course."

"It would break Betty all up if she knew it."

"But—don't you think——" hesitated the girl and, despite her bravest efforts, her eyes betrayed her deep distress.

Bob looked at her fixedly. "I say, you have a tender heart, Miss Thompson. What were you going to say?"

"I only meant—it seems unfair to—to—the girl," stammered Betty. "It puts her in a false position. Perhaps she has been spending a lot of money that she thought was hers."

"That's all right," declared Bob cheerfully. "Father and I will stand for it. We're pretty keen about Betty and—she's going to have everything she wants. So remember, if she shows up here, which she's apt to do, not a word about this, Miss Thompson."

"I'll remember," answered Betty, with a deeper meaning than her companion suspected.

Then there was silence again, broken only by the clicking of the machine.

"It's odd about Betty," Bob went on, half to himself. "I haven't seen her since she was a little tot about eleven. She was sailing for Europe."

Betty faced him with brightening eyes. "Really? You haven't seen her since then?"

He shook his head. "The last I saw of Betty was a little figure in a gray ulster and a Tam o' Shanter waving an American flag to me from the deck of a big steamer that was getting smaller every minute, while the lump in my throat was getting bigger."

The agitated girl bent closer over the keyboard to hide

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

her mantling color, while Bob continued, all unconscious of the effect he was producing. "That was twelve years ago. Betty must be twenty-three—think of that!"

"Do you think you'd know her if you saw her now?"

"Know her? Know Betty!" he exclaimed. "Of course I'd know her. I'd know her anywhere."

"Is she—er—pretty?"

Bob thought a moment, stroking his chin wisely. "Um—er—well, no, you couldn't call Betty pretty. Sort of lanky, long-legged girl, with freckles, but she had an air about her, even at eleven. I've no use for these magazine-cover sirens, anyway."

"Does she—does she ever write to you?"

He settled himself on the arm of an easy chair. "We used to write, but it dwindled. I haven't heard from Betty in a long time. You see, I've been hustling in New York, and—she's been studying singing in Paris. She thinks she has a voice, poor child!"

Betty smiled and bit her lip.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this. It can't interest you much," he said.

"Oh, but it does," she insisted. "I like to know about the people I am to meet. I suppose Miss Betty Thompson will visit here?"

"She's sure to some time, but you never can tell when. These singing people are all more or less crazy."

"Yes? I should think you'd write and tell her you're here. That would surely bring her."

"Ah! You're teasing now, but—by Jove, that isn't a bad idea! I believe I will write to her."

"Shall I take it down for you?" She looked at him quite seriously and then put a fresh sheet in the machine as if awaiting his dictation.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"What? On the typewriter? What would Betty think?"

"That depends. Do you owe her a letter?"

"Owe her? It's the other way around. She owes me a whole bunch of letters."

"Well, then, I should think——" she began, but Bob interrupted with a burst of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha! I'll do it. I'll be very stiff and formal. It will puzzle her anyway, but—have you time?"

"Yes, Mr. Baxter," she said, with exceeding amiability. "I am ready."

Thus it came about that Betty's first duty as private secretary was to take down a letter to her own sweet self from a man who seemed to like Betty Thompson, not only as he remembered her eleven years ago, but as he saw her now without knowing it, which struck the fair secretary as decidedly amusing.

"My dearest Betty——" Bob began, then strode about the room in search of further inspiration. "Have you got that?"

"My dearest Betty," repeated Miss Thompson.

"That doesn't sound very stiff and formal, does it?" laughed Bob. "You wait a minute. Now, then." And he went on with suppressed merriment, "What in the world has become of you? I would have written oftener only I've been having such a lively time that I haven't had a moment. That'll make her sit up, eh?"

"Perhaps!" answered Betty demurely, as she clicked off the words.

"I met a dream of a girl in New York," he continued, "a brunette, and another on the steamer, a blonde—that makes two dreams—but they weren't either of them in

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

your class, Betty, dear?" Bob smiled complacently. "How's that, Miss Thompson?"

"Is it true?" asked Betty.

"About not being in her class? Well, I should say so. She's the finest, gamest, bulliest little sport you ever saw. Come to think of it, I don't believe I'll tell her about those other two girls I met. What's the use?"

"Do you think she would care?"

"Maybe not, but it sounds a little fresh and I wouldn't hurt Betty's feelings for the world. We'll cut the letter out, Miss Thompson. I'll write one by hand."

"Very well," obeyed the other, and drawing the sheet from the machine, she crumpled it up and threw it into the waste basket.

"It's funny how that letter brings her back to me," mused Bob. "What a loyal little sport she was! Always getting herself into scrapes to help other people out of them! And generous! Why, she'd give you her last dollar! She'd give you the coat off her back; yes, she would, Miss Thompson."

"She must be a perfect angel," smiled the girl.

"Not she. She's got a temper all right. I wouldn't give a hang for a girl who hadn't a bit of temper. We used to have regular fights. Ha, ha, ha! I remember when we broke Father's glasses in one of our scuffles. I did it, but Betty took the blame, or she tried to. Dad gave me an awful scolding and made me spend three dollars of my money for a new pair. Three dollars is a lot for a little fellow; it was all I had in the world and Betty was so sorry for me that—what do you suppose that little monkey did?"

"What?" questioned the secretary, and there was a quiver in her voice.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"She had no money of her own; Betty never had any money, so she took her new club skates and her bicycle, mind you, she just loved that bicycle, and she sold 'em both to a boy named Cohen for three dollars."

An indignant look flashed in Betty's eyes. "Sammy Cohen! Little Shylock!"

Bob looked at her sharply. "How did you know his name was Sammy?"

"Why—didn't you say Sammy Cohen?" she answered in confusion.

"Did I? Well, anyway, Betty stuffed that three dollars into my savings bank because she knew I wouldn't take it. Can you beat that?"

At this moment their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Parker, the butler, who came to say, with mysterious nods and a grim tightening of the lips, that Mr. Fitz-Brown and the countess had got in trouble with the car at the foot of the hill and that Anton had gone to their assistance. Whereupon Bob Baxter hurried off to see what was the matter and Parker hurried after him, if Parker could ever be said to hurry.

Betty was glad to be alone, and for some minutes she sat thinking—thinking—while a perplexed smile played about her sweet mouth and a new gladness shone in her eyes, a gladness that kept coming back and would not be denied, try as she would to frown it away. There were difficulties and sorrows attending Miss Elizabeth Thompson, but one great cheering fact rose above them and made life seem worth living after all, the eternally blessed fact that, when youth hears the call of love, then nothing else in the world matters very much. She rose suddenly from her chair and, searching eagerly in the

## THE NEW SECRETARY

---

---

waste basket, drew forth a crumpled sheet and, smoothing it out, gazed at it with quickening pulses.

"My dearest Betty," she murmured, and her lovely face was radiant with a great happiness. "My dearest Betty! My dearest Betty!" She spoke the words softly, over and over again. And, yielding to the cry of her heart, she pressed the precious paper to her lips, then proudly, joyously thrust it into her bosom.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A FACE IN THE GLASS

**S**HORTLY before one o'clock the chiming gong for luncheon resounded pleasantly through the big house and Mrs. Baxter, with thoughtful consideration, came to the library for Betty, who, owing to her secluded dinner the evening before and her breakfast in bed, had not yet met the relatives.

"Don't you think, my dear," began Eleanor, "that we had better stop this foolishness before it goes any farther? Really, now?"

"It's not foolishness, it's very far from foolishness," declared the girl. "You promised to respect my wishes, Mrs. Baxter." Her eyes were so serious that the other yielded forthwith and, leading the way to the dining room, presented Mr. Baxter's new secretary, Miss Thompson, to the assembled guests; and, suddenly, by their indifferent civility, Betty realized how, by a word, she had reduced her importance in the world of Ipping House to about that of a nursery governess.

Very much on her dignity, the new secretary began her meal, seated between Harriet Merle and Lionel Fitz-Brown and directly opposite the Countess Clendennin, whom she studied with alert feminine interest, partly because Kate was obviously a pretty woman of the dashing, showy kind that all other women regard as natural enemies (especially if they happen to be widows under

## A FACE IN THE GLASS

---

thirty) and chiefly because the countess had Bob Baxter on her right and seemed disposed to make the most of this proximity. "She isn't losing any time," thought Betty, giving Lionel the "listening look," while she noted the breezy unconcern of Kate Clendennin's attack. "She'll be calling him 'old top' in another minute," she said to herself, and Kate, in the next breath, actually did say "my dear boy." Betty laughed aloud, causing Lionel to beam with the happy consciousness of having scored a hit.

Some deprecating references to a Hollandaise sauce served with the turbot drew from Eleanor an apology for the inefficiency of a new cook. There was trouble in the kitchen, she explained, owing to the fact that Mr. Baxter had discharged the housekeeper, Mrs. Edge. This was the first thing he had done the previous evening. He thought Mrs. Edge extravagant and no doubt she was, and, of course, Mr. Baxter must do as he thought best, but it did seem a pity to upset the household.

This indication of Hiram's attitude toward extravagance cast a momentary gloom over the company, which was dissipated by the countess, who pointed out amusingly, and with surprising culinary knowledge, exactly what was wrong with the Hollandaise and added that the late count, her husband, had been an invalid for years before his death, during which time Kate had personally seen to the preparation of his meals.

"I say, Miss Thompson," chuckled Fitz-Brown, in a whisper, "she probably poisoned the old boy. Eh, what?" This genial fancy threw the gentleman into a paroxysm of suppressed laughter.

Betty turned to scrutinize her neighbor and the sight of his jolly, wholesome countenance, as he put forth this



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

singular suggestion, brought her back to complete good humor. England has produced various types of great men, great fighters on land and sea, great writers, great orators, and so have other countries, but England has undisputed preëminence in one variety of masculine product, that is the amiable, monocled, haw-haw, dear old chap, well-meaning, silly ass creation that blooms extensively in London clubs and drawing-rooms.

Such was Lionel Fitz-Brown, who had not been at Betty's side for five minutes before he had given her detailed information as to his dear old uncle in Upper Tooting, who had the title, don't you know, that would come to him one of these days if something would only happen to his cousin in Wormwood Scrubs, who stood between and was disgustingly healthy.

"Can't you get him to go in for flying machines?" suggested Betty mirthfully.

"I say! that's an idea, Miss Thompson," exclaimed Lionel, readjusting his eyeglass. "By Jove, that's an idea! What an awfully jolly thing if I could get one of those airmen or birdmen to give my uncle a few lessons!" And again he burst into roars of laughter.

Betty's attention was now drawn to some remarks of Harriet Merle touching the Progressive Mothers' bazaar that was to be opened this afternoon in St. Timothy's parish house. Harriet dwelt with pride on the fact that her husband, the Reverend Horatio, was to deliver the address. The Reverend Horatio, she said, was at present resting in his room in preparation for his oratorical flights and Harriet would bring him up a light luncheon on a tray. Horatio found it necessary to be very abstemious at these periods of intense mental concentration.

At which Lionel again exploded softly for Betty's par-

## A FACE IN THE GLASS

---

ticular benefit. "Haw, haw, haw! I'll tell you about this intellectual concentration," he confided. "There's a jolly good reason why the Reverend Horatio isn't sittin' in that chair next to the countess puttin' down this beastly sauce and all the rest of it."

"Tell me," laughed Betty.

"Bend over so she can't hear. Now! It's because she jolly well locks Horatio in his room and leaves him there until he gets his work done."

Betty's eyes danced. "Doesn't he like to work?" she whispered.

"Like to work! Why, Mrs. Horatio nailed up the blinds yesterday in the Reverend Horatio's room so he couldn't climb out through the window. Haw, haw, haw! Intense intellectual cat!"

Whether this last was meant as a slur on Harriet or a compliment to Martin Luther Betty never discovered, for at this moment the luncheon came to an end with a murmur of talk as to afternoon plans. The countess, having flashed her fascinations on young Baxter, now carried him off with a suggestion of cigarettes. Mrs. Baxter proposed a drive and offered to drop the Merles at St. Timothy's, which offer Harriet accepted for herself alone, explaining that the walk would do Horatio good and would allow him to continue his oratorical meditations uninterrupted. This proved to be an unfortunate decision.

Betty returned to her work in the library, where she was glad to be alone, away from the chatter and the trivialities, alone with her thoughts; yet not alone, for every corner of this great room seemed alive with memories of the morning, memories of him. What a very great difference a few hours had made! How extraordi-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

nary that this vigorous young American, whom she not seen for years, should have suddenly—without tending to do it, without dreaming that he had done should have—well, what had he done? What was truth about her feeling for this playmate of her childhood, Bob Baxter?

Does a woman ever admit, even to herself, that a man has won her heart until she has good reason to believe that she has won his? Does a pretty woman, a young and charming woman, ever admit such a thing? Probably not, and Betty was no exception to this rule of feminine reserve. But there were two significant indications in her thoughts, one that she did not intend to enjoy the Countess Kate's flirtatious tendencies with him and the other a decision that now she could not break in incognito, even if she would. Her pride forbade it. To let Bob know that she was his old friend, Betty Thompson, would be a confession of weakness, as if she admitted that she was not charming or pretty enough to attract him simply as Miss Thompson. No, decidedly she would not tell him.

Betty had just arrived at this self-respecting conclusion when there came a step outside and the curate entered.

"I beg your pardon," he began timidly. "I am Reverend Horatio Merle, one of the relatives. I believe you are Miss Thompson, the new secretary?"

"Yes," said Betty.

Horatio consulted his watch and paused as if making an arithmetical calculation.

"Let me see, the bazaar opens at half past three. My watch says five minutes past three, which means that it is really a quarter past two. I like to keep my watch

## A FACE IN THE GLASS

---

fifty-five minutes ahead of time, Miss Thompson," he explained, with a bright smile.

"Why not an hour ahead?" she laughed.

"No, no! An hour would be too much. Fifty-five minutes gives me exactly time to dress and shave and—I beg your pardon for going into these details. The point is I had just started for the bazaar—you see I like to go leisurely—and I was passing the lodge when I met a young woman, a fellow country-woman of yours—my wife mentioned to me, Miss Thompson, that you are an American?"

"Yes, I'm an American."

"Ah! Very fortunate! Extremely fortunate!" He stood twisting his long fingers together in great satisfaction. "The young woman I speak of is also an American, a most deserving person, but—er—she has met with reverses and—er—Mrs. Baxter has been kind enough to let her stay at the lodge and do what she can to—er—assist."

"I see," nodded the girl.

"Her name is Hester Storm, and, as she naturally feels lonely here, being an American, I thought that you would speak to her and—er—perhaps encourage her?"

"Of course I would."

"I may add that Miss Storm rendered me an important service the other day when I was sore beset in—er—I'll explain that later on. She is outside now, in fact, she seems anxious to meet you and—er—may I?"

"Certainly," said Betty, with cordial sympathy and following the curate toward the conservatory she made out the figure of a woman in a red cloak, a strangely familiar red cloak, sharply contrasted against the foliage, and as the woman turned and came forward Betty saw,

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

with a start of recognition, that it was her companion on the train, Jenny Regan.

"This is the young woman—Miss Hester Storm," said the curate.

"Miss Hester Storm?" repeated Betty, in surprise while the other threw her a beseeching glance for silence.

"Yes. An interesting name, is it not?" chattered Merle, quite oblivious to the rapid pantomime that was passing between the two women. "She has been traveling with a Russian princess, but the princess drank—was very unfortunate and—Hester will tell you about it—won't you, my dear?"

"I'll tell her all about it," answered the dark-eyed girl, and she managed, with the pleading of her eyes, to give the words a double meaning.

This being arranged, Horatio took a hurried departure, announcing that he must have time to compose his message before the Progressive Mothers' address.

"Well?" questioned Betty, when the two women were alone.

"Don't blame me, Miss Thompson, until you've heard what I have to say," begged Hester.

"He called you Hester Storm."

"I know, but——"

"Your name is Jenny Regan—isn't it?"

"Please let me speak. I couldn't give my real name after what happened on the train. It's been printed on the papers and—don't you see, nobody here would have trusted me? It's terrible to be suspected of a thing when you're innocent."

Betty pondered this. "I suppose that is true," she agreed, and Hester breathed more easily. At least she was to have a chance to tell her story, some story, a

## A FACE IN THE GLASS

---

her inventive faculties had never failed her yet. It was a pity if she couldn't cook up a tale that would satisfy this rich girl's curiosity without arousing her suspicion.

"You want to know how I happen to be here?" anticipated Hester.

Betty admitted that she would like to know this and straightway the other began her extemporization, the general lines of which, it must be said, had been planned in advance, for she realized that her benefactress was no fool. It was simply a plausible continuation of her hard luck story as outlined on the train, with a vivid insistence on the shock she had suffered through being unjustly suspected. This was the last straw and it had broken her spirit. No one would believe in her or help her, and she hadn't the courage to struggle any longer. She didn't care what happened to her, she didn't want to live and—just as she was in this wicked spirit, she had thought of Betty, and it had seemed as if she heard a voice telling her to go to this gentle lady who had befriended her and—trusted her and—

At this point, as Hester was working up to an effective climax of sighs and tears, Parker entered and addressed Betty in his most haughty manner.

"Mr. Robert Baxter gave me these 'ere letters. He said I was to give 'em to the new secretary."

"Very well," said Betty, and she took the papers, while the dark girl stared in amazement. The tables were suddenly turned.

"The new secretary?" questioned Hester, when the butler had gone. "He called you the new secretary?" Her eyes were on Betty steadily now, and they were no longer pleading, submissive eyes, but had suddenly become hard and suspicious.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"Why—er—I can explain that," Betty hesitated.

Hester nodded shrewdly. "It'll take a lot of explaining, if you ask me. On the level, are you a lady or—what?"

"I've been doing Mr. Baxter's secretarial work——" She felt the color flaming in her cheeks under Hester's bold scrutiny. "It's a—a sort of a joke."

"A joke? You pound that typewriter—for a joke?"

"Why—er—I do it to help Mr. Baxter."

Hester studied Betty silently, then, in a cold, even tone, "Say, lady, you'll have to show me. I'm in bad myself and—I want to know about you. Ain't this Mr. Baxter that you're tryin' to help, ain't he a rich man?"

"Yes, but—Mr. Baxter has had losses in business and—he has enemies and—— Oh, you wouldn't understand! You can't understand!"

Hester turned away and walked toward the conservatory. She must think. After all it was none of her business why Elizabeth Thompson was doing Baxter's secretary work. Hester was at Ipping House for the golf bag and for nothing else, and straightway she returned to her original plan of propitiating Miss Thompson and thus establishing herself in the Baxter household.

"All right, lady," she said, softening her tone, "I'll take your word for it, but—if you've had troubles yourself you know how I feel and—all I ask is a chance to work and—make a living."

"What kind of work can you do?"

"Sewing, all kinds of sewing and—I can trim hats. I make all my own things. I made this dress and this cloak."

"Really! I think your cloak is very smart," and Hester reflected that it might well be, seeing that she had

## A FACE IN THE GLASS

paid five hundred francs for it on the Rue de la Paix.

"I suppose I could recommend you to Mrs. Baxter and the other ladies," hesitated Betty, "for sewing and mending, only—there's our meeting on the train—it's very awkward."

"Why is it? We don't have to tell them about the train, do we? I'm here anyway. The Reverend Merle got me here. All I ask you to do is to let me fix over some dresses and shirtwaists."

"Very well," decided the secretary. "I'll do that."

"Say, will you let me begin right away? Will you? So I can satisfy that she dragon down at the lodge?"

"Mrs. Pottle?"

Hester nodded, with expressive pantomime indicating the nature of the dragon. "If that old thing knows I'm sewing for the ladies here she'll let up on the scrubbing talk. Why should I scrub when I can sew?"

This sounded reasonable and Betty began to feel that she had been not quite kind to Hester.

"It's a good time now," she said, with increasing friendliness. "I've nearly finished this work and, if you don't mind going to my room, we'll see what we can find."

The Storm girl gave a little gasp of joy. Was there ever anything as easy as this? Would she mind going to Miss Thompson's room! Would she mind taking \$25,000 on a gold spoon? Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

But she simply answered with a grateful, innocent look, "I'll be glad to go."

So they climbed the winding stair, Hester thrilling with expectation. She had no doubt the bishop's purse was still in the golf bag's depths where she had dropped it, and the golf bag itself was probably in this very room



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

where they were going; or, if not there, it must be knocking about in some odd corner or dusty closet, where she would quickly find it, now that she had the run of the house, and, having found it——

"Oh!" she cried suddenly and stopped short at the open door, unable to speak or to move, for there, in plainest sight, resting against a tall chest of drawers, was the coveted object, the treasure-holding golf bag.

"What is it?" asked Betty.

"Nothing, lady. I—I was a little out of breath," stammered the girl, recovering herself quickly. Here was her golden opportunity and she must not spoil it by any queer behavior.

And now Hester's luck attended her, for not only was Betty quite oblivious to her protégée's agitation, but, after some perfunctory wardrobe investigation, she remembered, with misgivings, those letters that Bob had sent to be copied, and she fell in readily with an artful suggestion that the sewing girl be left here in the chamber to repair a torn skirt while Betty descended to her duties in the library. It really was too easy!

As soon as she was alone Hester moved swiftly toward the golf bag, then paused and glanced cautiously about her. Every moment was precious, but she must make no mistakes. A chance like this wouldn't come twice to a girl and—what was that?

She listened intently, afraid of her own breathing. Silence! It must have been a creaking timber. Absolute silence! Ah, there was the typewriter clicking! A good thing Miss Thompson had left the little door ajar! She could hear any slightest sound from the library, any step on the stair.

Very carefully Hester lifted the golf bag by its sup-



seemed to Hester that she had seen this man somewhere before."



## A FACE IN THE GLASS

---

porting strap. She remembered how the clubs had rattled that day in Charing Cross station. They rattled a little now. Should she take them out or try to reach down into the bag? Better see where the purse was first. No, she couldn't see. There were too many clubs packed in close together and—it was all dark—down at the bottom. Perhaps she could see better by the window or—ah! the electric light! There by the dressing table! She could hold the bag right under it.

A moment later, with a smothered click, the lamp gave forth its yellow glare, and, quivering with excitement, Hester looked down among the clubs. One glance was enough. There at the very bottom, nestling comfortably between a niblick and a cleek, lay the fat brown purse held tight in its elastic band, the bishop's purse, with its incredible hoard of banknotes. The thing was done! The trick was turned! She had only to lay the bag softly on Betty's bed—there, and reach her arm in and—what was that?

With a swift, instinctive movement Hester stood the golf bag back in its corner, then turned slowly, and, as her eyes swept the mirror, she saw that she was deathly pale. What was that creaking noise? A step? She strained her ears, but there was no sound save the steady typewriter murmur from below. Then, still looking in the mirror, she gazed, fascinated, at a door on the farther side of the chamber, not the door to the library stair, but another door, a green door, and, as she looked, this door opened slightly and she saw distinctly the reflection of a man's face, a man with a slightly twisted nose and a shock of black hair. He was standing there in the green door staring at her, and it seemed to Hester that she had seen this man somewhere before.

## CHAPTER IX

### A FLASH OF MEMORY

**T**HE man opened the green door and came forward slowly into the chamber, but he came in a shambling, apologetic way, and Hester realized that he was not there in any aggressive or accusing spirit. On the contrary, he looked at her almost pleadingly out of small, shifty eyes. Where had she seen those eyes before?

"Who are you? What do you want?" she demanded.

He stood still, working his lips nervously under his little black mustache.

"I am Anton, the chauffeur," he said glibly. "There's a pane of glass broken in the roof of the conservatory and Mr. Baxter asked me to fix it. I was going out through that window. I didn't know any one was here, Miss—er——" he looked at her inquiringly.

"He got away with that all right," she reflected. Where had she seen this man? Was it in Paris? In Monte Carlo? In New York? And suddenly, by one of those quick intuitions that had often guided her, she decided to take the aggressive.

"Don't you remember me?" she smiled. "Hester Storm?"

"Hester Storm?" he reflected. "No, I—I can't say that I do."

He lifted a hand to his forehead, then ran his fingers

back through his thick hair, and Hester noticed a single white lock threading the black mass just above the temple. Where had she seen a white lock like that?

Again he ran his fingers through his hair and paused, with arm lifted and elbow forward, while his hand grasped the back of his head. It was an awkward position and—she had seen it before—she had seen a man somewhere—hold his head like that and—look straight before him the way this man was looking.

“I must have been mistaken,” she said quietly. She began to wonder if Anton suspected her. Could he know anything? How long had he been standing at that green door before she saw him? “Why are you staring at me like that?” she asked.

“Just to make sure, but—no, I don’t know you; I’ve never seen you.” He put down his arm and listened a moment to the reassuring sound of the typewriter. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

“I’m doing sewing for Miss Thompson,” she answered innocently. She spoke in a low tone, and she noticed that he spoke in a low tone.

“What made you think I knew you?” he continued.

“Why I—I don’t know. It was just an idea.”

“Do you know me? I mean have you ever seen me before?”

She shook her head. “I thought I had, but—I’ve got you mixed with somebody else. No harm, is there?” she added, with a little laugh that parted her red lips while her dark eyes glowed on him alluringly.

“Not a bit. Say, you look like an Italian, but you talk like an American.”

“I am an American.”

“From New York?”

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"From New York."

The chauffeur studied her admiringly for a moment. "That's my town. Good old Manhattan Island! Say, Miss Storm, why were you so pale just now?"

"Pale? Was I pale?" she trembled.

"You sure were; you looked as if you'd seen a ghost. And now that I think of it—say, that's funny!" He stopped short, his two hands on his hips, and eyed her with a keen sidelong glance.

"What is funny?"

"Why, when I come in you gave me the haughty look—like this," he struck the attitude of a tragedy queen. "Who are you? What do you want?" he mimicked her. "Then a minute later you're all smiles and friendly and ask if I don't remember you? How is that, Miss Hester Storm?"

"I don't see anything strange about it," she began uneasily. "I thought—er."

"You thought you knew me," he interrupted. "And if you knew me who did you think I was? That's what I want to know." There was a note of menace in his tone, as if he felt that he had the best of the situation.

"I've told you I was mistaken," answered Hester sharply. "I don't care to talk about this any more. You'd better fix that pane of glass—if there is any pane to fix."

It was a chance shot, but it went home. "What do you mean by—by that?" stammered Anton.

"Oh, nothing."

He took a step nearer and she saw that he was white with anger. "You'd better not take that smarty tone with me, young lady. I've got something on you, all right. You weren't doing much sewing when I opened

## A FLASH OF MEMORY

---

---

that door. Oh, I saw you! Some time before you saw me. Say, what was there so very partic'larly interesting about that golf bag?"

It was a critical moment for Hester and she rose to it finely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed carelessly, although terror was clutching her heart. "Do you want to know why I was looking in that golf bag, Mr. Anton?"

"Yes, I do," he answered roughly, "and I'm going to know right now."

He strode toward the golf bag and seized it by the strap.

"You'd make a good detective, Mr. Chauffeur," she tittered. "I dropped my scissors into that bag and I'll be much obliged if you'll fish them out for me."

So natural was her tone and so convincing her air of good-natured derision that Anton turned, hesitating, while one hand rested on the golf bag. Then, as before, he ran the fingers of his other hand through his mane of hair and clasped the back of his head in perplexity. It must have been this characteristic attitude that brought the flash of memory.

"Ah!" cried Hester, in sudden inspiration. "Now I know where I saw you."

The thrill of exultation in her voice convinced the wavering chauffeur and he came toward her in alarm, leaving the golf bag.

"Where?" he demanded.

She half closed her eyes as if looking at a distant picture.

"In a rathskeller—on Forty-second Street—near Broadway—one night," she answered in broken sentences.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Well?"

"You were sitting at a table with a man who looked like a Tenderloin sport or—a Bowery tough. He had a blue handkerchief around his head—so. He had lost a piece of his ear."

Anton listened, fascinated.

"How do you know he had?"

"I heard him tell you. He said the top of it had been bitten off. That's why I noticed him. Remember?"

"You're crazy. I never was in a rathskeller on Forty-second Street. And I don't know any man who's had his ear bitten off." He paused and again moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "What was the man's name?"

"I don't know his name," answered Hester, "but I heard some sweet things he said and a few that you said and——" she laughed at him tauntingly. "You have a nice, elegant line of friends, Mr. Anton."

"I tell you it wasn't me," he blustered.

"Oh, yes, it was. I know you by that white lock in your hair and—see here, I know you by another thing. I'll prove it. Let's see you smile."

"Smile? Why should I smile?" He tightened his lips into a grim line.

"Because you'd look much better, for one thing. You're not pretty that way, Mr. Anton. And if you smile, you'll show a gold tooth on—let me see—on this side, a big, shiny gold tooth. Come, now, smile."

It is a matter of conjecture whether Anton, thus challenged, would or would not have revealed the treasures of his bicuspid region. At any rate he did not do so on this occasion owing to the fact that developments were suddenly interrupted by the sound of voices in the library below, followed by a light, quick step on the winding

## A FLASH OF MEMORY

---

---

air. Whereupon Anton, without smiling, without explaining, and without any further sign of interest in the imagined conservatory, faded away as he had come, through the green door, and with the same cringing, sycophantic manner. The honors of this brief but spirited engagement were easily won by Hester.

Swiftly the adventuress caught up the skirt she was supposed to be mending and, seating herself, began some movements of measurement, while her face took on an expression of diligent interest. A moment later Betty Thompson swept into the chamber and, to the absolute astonishment of the sewing girl, went straight to the golf bag.

White-faced, Hester rose to her feet. She could feel her hands and her lips getting cold. Was this the end of the game?

"Can I—can I do anything?" she managed to ask.

"No, no," said Betty cheerfully. "Don't get up. Mrs. Baxter wants to play golf and I'm going to lend her my bag. There!"

She caught up the bag and disappeared with it down the stair, while Hester, stunned by this sudden change of fortune, listened to the mocking rattle of the clubs.

## CHAPTER X

### HORATIO DISCOVERS A PEPPERMINT TREE

**A** CHARITY bazaar, generally speaking, is an invention designed to mitigate the sufferings of the rich during the painful operation of removing a small portion of their superfluous wealth for the benefit of the poor.

Charity, however, to appeal successfully to the taste feminine, must come in various shades and styles, and each of the ladies of St. Timothy's parish had her pet shade. So it happened that the date of this bazaar had been fixed and most of the arrangements completed long before the good ladies had agreed upon the charity to be benefited.

It was only after several stormy meetings that, for the sake of peace, it was agreed to leave Charity out of the question. And then it was that the Bishop of Buncheater, by a happy inspiration, suggested starting a branch of the Progressive Mothers' Society at Ippingford and, as the expenses of stationery, stamps and the salary of a secretary must be met, the object of the bazaar settled itself without further discussion.

Thanks to the untiring energy and unfailing tact of Mr. Ferdinand Spooner, secretary of the Progressive Mothers' Society, the ladies of the committee were not only on actual speaking terms with each other, but were working harmoniously together for the great cause.

Each of these ladies was happy in the consciousness that she had obtained, not through undue favor, but in recognition of her peculiar social preëminence, the table occupying the very best position in the hall. This also, it may be noted, was due entirely to the unfailing tact of Mr. Ferdinand Spooner.

Whenever Mr. Ferdinand Spooner was asked to admire any particular table, he praised it without stint, but he was ever careful to add that each of the tables was quite perfect in its own way, and, in the minutes of a subsequent meeting of the Progressive Mothers' Society, the resolution proposing that a vote of thanks be tendered to Mr. Ferdinand Spooner, for his untiring energy and unfailing tact, was moved, seconded and carried unanimously.

The bazaar had been advertised to open at half past three o'clock, and keenest interest had been aroused by the announcement that, on account of the indisposition of Dr. Dibble, the address would be delivered by the Reverend Horatio Merle. Almost every one in the parish knew Horatio Merle by sight. More often than not the curate and his wife were the only occupants of the Baxter pew, but such was his shrinking from grown up human society and so retired his walks that very few knew him personally. Harriet, too, for reasons of her own, worldly reasons, of which she was secretly ashamed, had responded meagerly to the friendly advances of the ladies of St. Timothy's. Nor, in this respect, were the Merles any exception in the Baxter household. Hiram, who with his son spent most of his time in America, regarded English society very much as he regarded the English climate and English business methods, and Eleanor preferred to share his seclusion

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

to braving the leveled lorgnettes and monocled stares at Hiram's homely American speech and manners.

As for Lionel Fitz-Brown and Kate Clendennin, they were sufficiently occupied with each other and dismissed the entire parish as a "beastly bore."

From her chair at the back of the hall Harriet Merle watched the clock anxiously. The hands now pointed exactly to half past three, the time fixed for the opening address. For twenty-seven hours Harriet had waited for this moment, had mentally rehearsed the scene to its minutest detail—the expectant hush that would follow the introductory remarks by the harmless but necessary Spooner—then Horatio, solemn, transfigured, in the black surplice that Harriet had only the morning before shaken from its long camphorous sleep, would slowly mount the steps to the platform, looking neither to the right nor to the left—and, when the hush had become absolutely unbearable, he would cough nervously and—

In sudden panic Harriet looked at the clock. It was five minutes past the time. The decorous applause that had followed the secretary's remarks on the duties of Progressive Mothers (a Progressive Mother must be progressive, she must nurse her babies—progressively, she must bathe them—progressively, she must punish them—progressively, etc.) had died away a long minute ago. The expectant hush was becoming unbearable. Where was Horatio? Why didn't he come? What had happened?

Ferdinand Spooner tiptoed importantly from one to another of the ladies of the committee. People were beginning to whisper. Harriet shrank into her meager feather boa. She clasped her hands till they hurt in her effort to keep from crying. Tears came into her eyes and

## A PEPPERMINT TREE

---

dropped upon the white gloves that she had worked so hard to clean for the occasion. Oh, why didn't he come? She had sat up half the night with him and made coffee to keep him awake till the address was written.

She thought of the money that Horatio would have received—one pound, perhaps even two pounds—and how she needed that money. Now there would be nothing.

What was the secretary saying? He feared that Mr. Merle had been unavoidably detained and the committee had decided that the address should be omitted, and he now declared the bazaar formally opened, and he asked them all to join in singing the national anthem. As the harmonium groaned the first bar of "God Save the King" and every one stood up, Harriet, grateful for the cover afforded by this ancient custom, but, for the moment, past all caring whether his majesty was saved or not, made her way to the door without attracting attention. Her only thought was to get out, out into the air and away from people—away from the sound of singing.

During this time Horatio, rejoicing in the thought that he was leaving his young protégée, Hester Storm, in a peaceful and sheltered haven, had turned down the shady drive on his way to the Progressive Mothers' bazaar.

At the first bend of the road the curate came to a standstill. Here a little green lane, leading to the woods, sidled off alluringly to the right. Merle shook his head. "No, thank you; no short cuts for me to-day," he said aloud, and quickly turned his back on the green temptress.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

As Horatio resumed his walk a small, plaintive voice close behind him caused him to look round. "Why Martin Luther!" he exclaimed, pointing sternly down the lane. "You go straight home!" Then as Martin Luther rubbed coaxingly against his legs: "It's no use you can't come. In the first place you've not been invited and in the second place it's a very mixed party. You wouldn't like them," he whispered consolingly as he lifted Martin Luther to his shoulder.

Fortunately it was only a couple of minutes' walk back to the lodge and there the cat could be left in the care of Mrs. Pottle or little An Petronia Pottle until his master was well out of range. Mrs. Pottle was properly shocked at the tale of Martin Luther's behavior—she had never seen the like of it, such a forward cat she would think shame before trying to go where she wasn't invited, and what for would he be wanting to be mixing himself up with the likes of the Progressiv Mothers—my word!

Martin Luther could listen respectfully to Merle for various reasons, one being that Merle was of his own authoritative sex, but Mrs. Pottle's theatricals only bore him and he retired to the square cave under the stone chimney seat which he assumed had been built for his exclusive use when he condescended to visit the lodge.

Mrs. Pottle followed the curate to the porch. "How about this Storm girl?" she asked.

"What do you mean? Don't you like her, Mrs. Pottle?" There was real concern in the clergyman's voice.

Mrs. Pottle folded her arms; her whole attitude was an answer to his question.

"I'm not saying if I likes the girl or don't like her, she went on; "but there's one thing I do say: She'

## A PEPPERMINT TREE

---

ever been taught how to make a bed, nor yet how to dust a room. And what's more," here Mrs. Pottle fumbled in her pocket, "I found this on her table." She held out a rabbit's foot, tinged at the end with pink powder.

"Bless my soul! The foot of a rabbit!" exclaimed Merle, in genuine surprise. "Dear me! This is most astonishing. Perhaps Miss Storm is interested in natural history."

"Natural 'istory?" cried Mrs. Pottle derisively. "Un-natural 'istory I calls it; that's what she powders her face with."

"You don't say!" said the curate gravely, returning the rabbit's foot to Mrs. Pottle. "I should never have known that. How does my little friend An Petronia like her?"

"An Petronia?" The old woman shook her head. "There's no telling," she said. "It'll take a better head than what I have to say what that child's thinkin' on. She's that deep and only eight years old come Michaelmas. She takes up with such funny people——" Mrs. Pottle stopped, confused and reddening at Merle's amused smile of acknowledgment. "Oh, Lor', sir; I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't mean——"

"That's all right, Mrs. Pottle," said the curate kindly. "What do you think? Your grandchild confided to me the other day that she is writing a book."

"Petronia writing a book! Well, I never!" exclaimed the astonished Mrs. Pottle. "It must be in her blood. And now I think of it, sir, her stepfather once kept a little stationery shop down Millbrook way—so it does come natural to her, doesn't it, sir?"

Merle laughed. "But you mustn't tell any one, Mrs. Pottle. It's a secret. No one knows about it but Petronia and you and me." He looked at his watch. "Half-



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

past two; I must be going. The bazaar opens at half past three; there's plenty of time, I know, but I fear to take any chances."

As the wicket gate closed behind the curate Mrs. Pottle ran down the path. "If you're going by the road, sir," she called after him, "you'll be meeting Petronia. She walked to the village over an hour ago with the little Royse girl and Freddy Nichol. It's Freddy's birthday and he's got a bright new threepenny bit to spend, and they're going to——"

Horatio, taking advantage of a compulsory pause for breath on the part of Mrs. Pottle, thanked her hurriedly and set off at a brisk pace toward Ippingford, and, so steadfastly did the good man set his face against the temptations of the wayside, that in less than half an hour he had passed the main street of the village and was within five minutes' walk of St. Timothy's parish house.

Then, to his great relief, the curate found by his watch that he had almost half an hour to spare. It was a welcome reprieve, such was Horatio's dread of this sudden plunge back into public life. Every moment was precious—what should he do?

"What a pity I did not meet An Petronia," he said to himself. She was a great friend of Horatio's, this strange little maid with gold-red hair and questioning deep-set eyes and that odd smile. Many were the walks and talks they had together, Petronia holding on by the curate's forefinger, asking questions. Such questions! How many buttercups full of rain can a mouse drink? Telling him tremendous secrets and confiding to him all her troubles, what mountains of troubles! And yet Merle had never heard Petronia cry, not even the time

## A PEPPERMINT TREE

---

when she was bitten by the frightened squirrel, whose foot she freed from the weasel trap, did An Petronia cry. Once when she had been disobedient and Mrs. Pottle had felt it necessary to whip her granddaughter, the child had not uttered a sound, which so frightened the old lady that she had never lifted a hand to the child since and never would.

The sound of children laughing startled Horatio from his reverie. He was passing the little sweetshop at the end of the village street, kept by one Mrs. Beadle, and behold, there was An Petronia surrounded by a mob of laughing, chattering playmates. They were looking in at the window and playing some game of Petronia's invention, in which the objects displayed in the shop window played an important part.

"Freddy Nichol, that's not fair! Peppermints doesn't gwow on twees," Petronia was saying in her odd, low-pitched voice as Merle came up to the group.

Instantly she was at her old friend's side and looking up in his face. "Does they, Daddy Merle?" she asked.

"Does what, my dear?" said Merle, taking her hand. He had not heard An Petronia's assertion.

"Does peppermints gwow on twees?"

"I didn't say peppermints, I said pepper," put in Freddy.

At this there was a perfect hubbub of "he dids" and "he didn'ts," as the children took sides, all but Petronia, who, having started the row, now stood tightly holding the curate's hand and watching the conflict with wide, fascinated eyes.

When things had arrived at the hair-pulling and slapping stage, Merle, feeling Petronia's hand tighten round his finger, had a sudden inspiration. Clapping his hands

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

to attract attention, he called out suddenly in the most thrilling tones at his command, "Who wants to know a secret?"

In an instant the clash of battle ceased, for a moment there was perfect silence, tiny tears were brushed away by grimy little fists, touzled hair was smoothed or tied back as the case might be, little girl arms stole around little girl waists and little boy elbows around little boy shoulders and then there burst forth a chorus of voices clamoring as one child, "Tell us the secret! Tell us the secret!"

"Children!" said the curate, when silence was restored, "I'm going to show you a peppermint tree!"

"A weally twuely peppermint twee, Daddy Merle?" said An Petronia, her eyes filled with wonder.

"A peppermint tree!" echoed the others.

"Yes," said Horatio, "a really truly peppermint tree with really truly peppermints on it, and I'm going to shake the tree and you shall catch the peppermints as they come down."

"Are we going to see it now?" asked An Petronia.

"Where is it?" eagerly chorused the others.

"It is only a little way from here," said the curate, as the plan formed itself in his mind, "but before we start I must go into the shop and see Mrs. Beadle. I am not quite sure just which tree is the peppermint tree, and, as Mrs. Beadle is so fond of peppermints, she will be able to tell me exactly how to find it. You had better wait for me at the corner," he added, "I shall only be a moment or two."

As the children trooped across the street, chirping and chattering, the curate, full of his happy little scheme and all oblivious of the flight of time, stepped into the shop.

## A PEPPERMINT TREE

---

A few moments later he reappeared and, if in the interim Mrs. Beadle's stock of peppermints had appreciably diminished, no corresponding increase of bulk was apparent in the region of Horatio Merle's pockets, so artfully had the sweets been bestowed about his clerical person.

At the corner of the lane the children awaited him in expectant silence. Without a word An Petronia slipped her little hand in his and down the lane they went, this strange hushed processional led by the gray-haired curate hand in hand with little An Petronia.

"Here it is!" cried Merle at last, pointing to a small acacia, a toy-like tree with slender trunk and bushy top that stood on the very edge of the wood. An unmistakable peppermint tree, thought An Petronia.

Following the clergyman's directions, the children formed a ring around the tree, while he stood in the middle clasping the thin trunk in both his hands.

"Now," said Merle, "I'm going to sing something and you must listen and sing it after me." He thought a moment and then sang:

"Tree, tree, Peppermint Tree!  
Let some peppermints fall on me!"

"Now, then, children, all together!"

They needed no rehearsal. Children have their own little notes like birds and cherubim, and, as for the tempo, the author and composer took care of that.

"Splendid!" cried the curate at the end of the first repetition. "Now, once more! And this time, children, you must keep your eyes fixed on the ground, and, when I shake the tree, if you are very careful not to look up, the peppermints will be sure to fall."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

Once more the cherub chorus rang through the wood and this time the branches of the peppermint tree were heard to swish and shiver and shake in the most exciting manner. Then all of a sudden the swishing and shivering and shaking stopped and down came a terrific shower of peppermints like big round sugar pennies, skipping and rolling on the grass at the children's feet.

"Here they come!" cried Merle, flushed with the success of his invention. "Fresh from the tree, pink peppermints! White peppermints! All ready to eat—fresh from the——" his voice stopped suddenly, the flush died on his face, leaving it a white mirthless mask of laughter. He was staring at the footpath only a few strides away, staring in consternation, for there stood Harriet with a look on her face that Horatio would remember to the end of his days. He called her name imploringly, he knew that she must have heard him, but she made no answer, she turned away and walked straight on.

The clock of St. Timothy's was striking. One—two—no need to count, he knew it was four o'clock. Harriet's look had told him everything. He had failed in his duty, he was disgraced—before everybody—and Harriet—how she must have suffered!

Close by, the children shouted and laughed and scrambled for peppermints. How little they knew the cost of their laughter. Their voices grew fainter as Horatio ran, ran despairingly, to overtake his wife. A moment later he was by her side breathless, pleading.

"Harriet—I forgot the time—I—— Don't leave me like this——"

Her only answer was to quicken her pace. He tried to take her hand, but she snatched it away quickly, contemptuously.



## A PEPPERMINT TREE

---

atio stood still. Dazed, stupefied, he watched his ntil she was out of sight, then, with unsteady steps, med into the shadow of the quiet, questionless and sank face downward among the ferns. Pres- there was a sound of something moving through rns and bushes. Nearer and nearer it came until it uite close to him, then a warm little hand, a pepper- hand, stroked his wet cheek and a tear-shaken the voice of An Petronia, quavered close to his Don't cwy, Daddy Merle."

## CHAPTER XI

### LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

**N**EITHER Lionel Fitz-Brown nor Kate Clendenin knew the precise degree of cousinship that constituted the bond of relationship between them. That such a bond existed had been the natural inference from their common relationship to Mrs. Baxter, since, to paraphrase Euclid, cousins that are related to the same cousin must be related to one another.

But when Cousin Lionel attempted to solve the genealogical problem with a proposition beginning "If your greatuncle, who was second cousin to Mrs. Baxter's grandmother, was a first cousin once removed to my aunt——" Kate put her hands to her ears and fled from the room. And when a few days later he attempted it again she threw a book at him.

On the third occasion (by this time they had dropped the "cousin" and were just Lionel and Kate) she suppressed him by putting her hand over his mouth, which only goes to show that relationship, if sufficiently remote, is no bar to friendly intimacy.

Lionel's frame of mind after meeting the new secretary at luncheon was a perplexing one. He retired to the billiard room to think it over, under cover of the noisy osculation of compulsory billiard balls. Lionel had never made claim to cleverness; indeed, he regarded it as rather stupid to be clever and downright bad form to be bril-

liant. "If a chap is a good shot and isn't afraid of a hedge with a barb wire in it, and knows how to fasten his tie, what more does he want?"

But this American girl—strange a girl like that should be a secretary!—had discovered to him unsuspected possibilities in himself. He had actually talked, he had even gone so far as to say one or two rather good things—that about aeroplanes, for instance—no, come to think of it, it was she who said that—what was it he had said? *Anyhow*, it had made the American girl laugh, so it must have been rather good. Extraordinary people, these Americans; how they sharpen one's wits! On the whole, he was rather pleased with himself. He wondered if Kate had noticed it.

As he thought of Kate, there rushed through his brain a succession of pictures of the countess and Robert Baxter at the luncheon table, mental snapshots forgotten at the moment, now vividly developed. . . . Kate with her head thrown back, laughing at something Baxter had said and incidentally displaying a curve of throat that would humiliate the most conceited lily petal. . . . Kate, leaning forward on her elbow, her chin slightly elevated on the palm of her hand, with an expression of rapt attention that is well worth while for a girl whose eyelids have such a delicious downward sweep. . . . Kate, in profile perdu, showing the pink lobe of an exquisite ear and her "jolly well brushed tan-colored hair" curving smoothly up from the nape of her neck. . . . Kate, with her upturned palm resting on the hand of Robert Baxter—confound him!

The billiard balls were in tempting position and Lionel, sighting for a follow shot, found his gaze irresistibly prolonged to the stretch of sunlit lawn, backed by dark



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

firs, to which the window opposite formed a frame. At the same moment two figures crossed his line of vision, walking slowly and apparently quite oblivious to their surroundings. With cue drawn back for the stroke, Lionel watched them pass slowly out of the picture. It was Kate Clendennin and Robert Baxter!

The next instant an osculatory outbreak of earsplitting intensity echoed through the billiard room, and the red and white affinities went spinning round the table, as Lionel slammed his cue into the rack and stormed out of the room. A few minutes later (when Kate came in to look for him) there was no sign of Lionel, and the demeanor of the billiard balls was as frigid and standoffish as if they had never been introduced—or were lately married.

At the evening meal, called supper by Hiram, Lionel did not appear, to the keen disappointment of Kate, who had descended into the kitchen in the loneliness of the late afternoon and prepared a *crème renversée* for his especial benefit.

It was late dusk when Fitz-Brown returned, by the golf course, from a ten-mile ramble over Ippingford downs. All his rancor, jealousy, if you will, had disappeared. He had clarified his mind by a physical process, a process at once primitively simple and profoundly scientific. For, if it is true that a physical ailment may be healed by a mental process, it is equally true that a mental ailment can be cured by a physical process. All Lionel did was to walk and walk and walk and allow the fresh summer wind, bounding over miles of gorse and heather, to sweep the fog from his brain. So that, by the time he emerged upon the Millbrook golf course he was able to see himself quite clearly and his self-ap-

## LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

---

---

ent was not flattering. He stood on the top of bunker and took a long breath as he delivered his ultimatum: "I'm a beastly ass," he said to himself. "Kate would be a fool to marry a duffer like

droke off suddenly as he caught sight of the girl, bareheaded and clad in a dinner gown, putting on a smile in the twilight.

She had already caught a glimpse of him as his tall figure stood for an instant silhouetted against the fading light, divining his intention to take her by surprise, and pressed herself to the business of putting with a certain absorption.

She held the ball for a breathless moment hesitated at the moment to raise the cup, then, Curtius-like, plunged into the abyss, a cheery "Bravo! Kate!" directly behind her a genuine start as perfect as any imitation she had ever given.

"How you startled me!" There was an air about Kate's personality that transmuted the sounds of profanity into the gold of pure speech. She smiled as she spoke.

"You, old girl," said Lionel, "it's not like you to be so noisy. I say, that was a ripping putt, almost in the hole."

She laughed. "That's just it. I couldn't see to

miss it?" mused Lionel; then bright-ly, "I say, that's rather good!" he laughed with a certain delight at having seen the point so quickly. "You're a good boy!" said Kate, patting him on the back. "I'm improving."

She stopped laughing. "Am I? By Jove! then

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

you've noticed it, too. Most extraordinary how it sharpens one's wits, rubbing up against Americans! Did you see me at lunch?" he inquired eagerly.

"Rubbing up against Americans?" Kate opened her eyes in feigned astonishment.

"Really, Kate, I wish you'd heard me," he went on earnestly. "I said one or two rather good things."

"To Mrs. Merle?"

"Oh, come, I say!" protested Lionel. "You know who I mean, the American girl—Miss—Miss——"

"Oh, the secretary," Kate stifled a yawn. "Sorry I didn't notice her. What's she like?"

A Machiavellian suggestion entered Lionel's artless mind. "Awfully jolly sort!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "Devilish pretty eyes—and fluffy hair—I wish I could remember it," he frowned.

"You've just said it was fluffy."

"I don't mean her hair; of course I couldn't forget that. I was trying to remember something I said to her."

"How unfortunate," purred Kate. "You should have written it down."

"It really wasn't bad," he went on. "Anyway it made her laugh, but—she wouldn't look at a duffer like me." He sighed athletically. "She's much too clever; half the time you don't know what she's driving at, but you can bally well believe what she says."

It was nearly dark and they had drifted toward a semi-circular rustic bench at the foot of a towering horse-chestnut. Lionel lighted his briar and sank, in sack-like ease, into the uncomfortable seat, lulled by the incense man burns only to himself, the envy of the watching gods who invented eating and drinking and

## LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

---

fighting and loving, and created the tobacco plant, but never thought of smoking.

Kate lighted a cigarette. But rustic seats with tree trunks for backs are not made for women. After picking some pieces of bark from her hair and attempting to fish others from the back of her neck, only to push them hopelessly out of reach, she jumped up impatiently and fell to pacing the soft turf behind the tree, the wavering light of her cigarette swaying hither and thither in the deepening gloom like a dissipated firefly.

"How very funny," she said at length, pausing in her walk to break the smoke silence, "that she can make you believe everything she says when you don't know what she's driving at. It sounds like mind reading."

Lionel watched a ball of gray smoke unravel itself and trail swiftly into the darkness above. "What's funny about mind reading?" he asked. "It strikes me it isn't any funnier than palm reading." Then after a contemplative pause, "That Baxter chap seemed to find your palm very interesting. Did he tell you anything exciting?"

"Very exciting," her voice came from the other side of the tree.

"I say, mayn't I know?"

"Oh, it wouldn't interest you."

"I hope it was something good. I'll punch Baxter's head if it wasn't."

"Then you do believe in palmistry?"

"What's that got to do with it? I say, Kate, what did he tell you?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because" — he hesitated — "because I ——" He stopped abruptly to listen. The blackness above them

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

was stirring. A tremor ran through the great tree. The darkness high overhead swayed with a sound like the sigh of rain on a lake. Unseen branches moved heavily and then were still. Mysteriously as it came, the wind died away. It was now quite dark under the tree. For a time neither spoke.

A fear he could not explain had come upon Lionel and stopped his speech. A few moments ago his only word for palmistry was tommyrot and now the writing on Kate's hand was to him the most momentous thing on earth.

Suddenly, out of the darkness came a strange sound—the sound of laughter, viewless laughter, that died away, leaving an uncanny silence.

"Kate! What is it? Where are you?"

There was no answer. He circled the tree swiftly with outstretched hand, guiding himself by the edge of the seat.

"Kate! For God's sake. What's the matter? Where are you?"

The next instant his free hand touched something and his arms closed around her. It was as if, in the space of a minute, he had lost this woman forever and suddenly found her again. And now he, Lionel Fitz-Brown, was holding Kate Clendennin in his arms. If the stone Diana in the sunken garden had turned to flesh and blood and found her way into his embrace it would not have been more astonishing, incredible. Here she was resting limply against him, her lovely head on his shoulder. He could feel her hair against his cheek.

"By Jove! She must have fainted," he muttered.

Carefully he placed Kate beside him on the rustic seat, supporting her tenderly with his arm, her head on

## LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

---

---

s shoulder, her cheek touching his. How feverish felt! He began to be alarmed.

"Kate!" he said in a low tone.

"Yes? What is it?" she whispered.

"How do you feel?"

"Pretty comfy." She nestled closer.

Lionel was astonished. "Didn't you faint?" he asked anxiously.

"Faint?" Kate sat up suddenly. "Is that what you ought?"

"What were you up to just now when I—when I und you?" stammered Lionel.

"I was—giving you the slip," said Kate.

"Giving me the slip? What for?"

"I wanted to get away before I—before I made a silly fool of myself and now—and now I've done it. Are you aware," she demanded abruptly, "that it's awfully late?"

Lionel struck his repeater. The tiny chimes clinged the hours and quarters against his right and Kate's left ear. They counted nine and three-quarters.

Kate straightened up and began smoothing her hair. "We must be getting back," she said.

Then an inspiration came to Lionel, born of romantic creature. "I say, Kate, I—er—I wish we could count our hours that way."

There was an agonizing pause.

"It would be economical," she mused, "to make one stitch do for two people."

"Oh, I say, you know what I mean, Kate," he went on desperately, "get married and all that sort of thing. I know an awfully jolly little farm down in Kent, only thirty pounds a year."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"Yes? And what would we live on?"

"Why, we'd keep a cow—and a hen—and a bee—and all that sort of thing."

"A bee?" Kate burst out laughing, then, suddenly, dropping her bantering tone, she cuddled her firm white hands into Lionel's big brown ones.

"Lionel," she reasoned, "I don't think I've ever really been in love in my life and you're the only man I ever met that made me want to—no, no! Please, Lionel listen to me," she held him gently away from her—"made me want to run away. Now I'm going to tell you what the palm-reader said," she continued, purposely avoiding the name of Robert Baxter.

"You don't really believe that tommyrot?"

"I do this time because what he told me is going to come true." She placed her hands on his shoulders with an affectionate movement. "He told me I'm going to have heaps and heaps of money! Lionel, aren't you glad?"

There was something far from gladness in Kate's own voice and Lionel's heart sank in utter desolation.

His thoughts flew back to the day of their first meeting three months ago—to the first time she had called him "Cousin Lionel"—to the time when somehow or other they had dropped the "cousin" and were Lionel and Kate to one another—three milestones on the road that led to—where might it not lead to? And now she was turning back. Where? He reflected that he knew nothing of Kate's world before she had come to Ipping House. From time to time there had been letters for her with German or Swiss postage stamps. That was all.

"So you see," Kate was going on, "it's a case of Hob-

## LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

---

---

son's choice. There's nothing else to be done. My money's all gone. Old Baxter has behaved like a brick, but I can't bank on him forever, and now if I—if I marry Bob——" she broke off with the sound of a laugh.

Lionel shivered. He seized her hand which showed dimly white at his side. It was like ice. It slipped from him upward and his ear caught the multitudinous whisper of chiffons.

"Come on," she said.

He rose stupidly and followed her in the darkness.

Half an hour later, as they approached Ipping House, Kate saw what seemed like a shadowy figure that glided past the conservatory and disappeared.

"What was that?" She clutched his arm.

"I didn't see anything," answered Lionel.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE GRAY LADY

**T**HE shadowy form seen by Kate Clendennin near the conservatory was no phantom born of emotional excitement, but a flesh-and-blood creature, a keenly alert sentinel, stealthily waiting and watching for a specific and serious purpose.

For more than one of the dwellers at Ipping House this had been an important day. To Betty Thompson it had brought the suddenly revealed glory of a deep love, to Lionel and Kate the first delicious whisperings of mutual passion and the pain of renunciation, to Horatio Merle it had brought humiliation and self-abasement and to this poor, soul-stifed girl, Hester Storm, it had brought the opportunity to steal \$25,000.

With her own eyes Hester had seen the purse; it was there in the golf bag, she had almost had it in her hands. Almost! If that tumble-haired, shifty-eyed chauffeur had kept away she would have had the money. And if Mrs. Baxter hadn't borrowed the golf bag, just at the wrong moment, she would have had it. Hard luck twice. Well, the third time would be different, and she would land the goods. In the whole world she was the only person who knew where this purse was, so all she had to do was to watch the golf bag and wait for another chance.

Through the long afternoon Hester watched and

## THE GRAY LADY

---

---

ted in Betty Thompson's chamber, showing an industry and zeal in her sewing that Betty thought most commendable. All this time the girl was eyeing the sk, wondering if, before she finished her work, Mrs. Baxter would return the golf bag. But no Mrs. Baxter cared and at six o'clock she was obliged to go. Miss Thompson wished to dress for dinner and—no, she did need a maid.

Hester walked slowly back to the lodge considering at her next move should be. Evidently she must act quickly or someone else might see the purse. Someone might already have seen it. Some caddy boy! Or Mrs. Baxter herself. There it lay, down among the books, quite unguarded except by the darkness in the bottom of the bag. Hester's hope lay in that little corner of darkness and in the unlikelihood that any one would search there.

What would Mrs. Baxter do with the golf bag after she had finished using it? She would naturally return it to Miss Thompson. She would return it this evening and Miss Thompson would naturally put it in her chamber, just where it was this afternoon, there in the corner by the dressing-table.

And then what? The Storm girl's face darkened and her hands shut tight. This was no time for trifling with time. The opportunity was hers now, this night, and it might be gone to-morrow. She must act at once. At once! Before she reached the lodge this decision had taken form vaguely in her mind, and, before she had finished her supper, it was clearly crystallized: she must do something before morning. Something! But what?

At a quarter before seven Hester heard the panting

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

of an automobile near the lodge gate and, hurrying to the window, she watched Mrs. Baxter and Robert as they swept past in the big, closed car, the young man driving. Stare as she would the agitated girl was unable to catch sight of the golf bag, but she knew it was inside the car, it must be there; in a few moments it would be back in Ipping House, where she might get it—if she only could think how—later in the night.

Later in the night! That meant entering the big house secretly and lying in wait until she could make her search. She could look in the library, in the hall in the hall closet under the stairs. That would be easy but suppose the golf bag were not there? What if Mr. Baxter had brought it to her own bedroom or to Miss Thompson's bedroom? Then what?

Hester finished her supper soon after seven and immediately went to her room—to be alone—to think. She felt impelled to do this thing, but she must plan every move with the utmost caution. No one, better than she, knew how dearly she might have to pay for one mistake.

At nine o'clock the girl stole softly out into the parlour. Old Mrs. Pottle had gone to bed early and the lodge was still. An Petronia, with her four beloved "Pottles" ranged beside her, was dreaming of "Reginal" and his misfortunes. Over the beeches and the dim, grassy mass of the manor a purple darkness was settling and the little creatures of the night were pulsing the strange chorus. The air was warm and the girl went forth, bareheaded, gliding among the shadows like one of them. There were several small objects in her trunk that she might have taken to help her on this sinister expedition, several objects that she was impelled to

take, but, on reflection, she left them behind, all but one.

For a long time Hester hovered about the manor watching the lights, listening to the sounds, rehearsing over and over again in her mind the details of the night's effort, as she thought it would work out. Mr. Baxter was in London. Mrs. Baxter had gone to her room, there was her light, burning brightly, one flight up under the gray stone tower. And there was Mr. Robert's light, two flights up over the far end of the conservatory. The golf bag would not be in his room, that was sure.

What about Miss Thompson? For nearly an hour her little chamber had been dark. She must have gone to bed early. Sound asleep by now. Hello! There goes Mr. Robert's light. And there sound the stable chimes. Ten o'clock! All dark downstairs except a light in the big front hall.

And now two dim figures approached across the lawn, Fitz-Brown and the Countess, and Hester shrank away among the shadows. Lionel took down a key from a nail outside the conservatory (where he often left it when he came in late) and, opening the door, bowed Kate in, then followed, closing the door, but quite forgetting to lock it. Thus fortune favored the young adventuress, as it had before many times.

With the illumination of a match held by Lionel, the tardy pair passed through the dark conservatory, then on through the library and out into the spacious hall, where each took a silver candlestick from a table where a row of these were placed in shining readiness every evening.

Very cautiously Hester opened the conservatory door and stepped inside, closing the door silently after her.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Motionless, almost breathless, she listened as the other parted at the stairs. Queer lovers! Was that the best they could do?

"Good-night, Kate."

"Good-night, old chap."

Lionel extinguished the hall light and, with flaring candle-shadows dancing behind them, these two climbed the stairs. Then came the closing of distant bedroom doors and Ipping House, dark and silent, settled down to slumber, while the adventuress waited.

Eleven! Twelve! One o'clock! to the slow, sootying voice of the bells. Those who prowl by night under strange roofs must learn patience and, while these hours passed, Hester scarcely stirred, except from chair to bench, then back again from bench to chair, noiselessly for she wore sneakers with rubber soles. She played odd little games with the moon-beams, making bets with herself as to how long, measured in heart beats, it would take a certain little flickering yellow fellow with a funny tail to creep from one crack to another. And she found that she could make her heart beat slower by taking long, deep breaths, which sometimes helped her to win.

At half-past one Hester turned the switch of a tiny electric lantern that hung from a cord around her neck. A beam of concentrated light flashed across the room and instantly vanished as the switch went back. The storage battery was working well. It was time to start.

Throwing her spot of light here and there, the girl made a round of the conservatory, scrutinizing every corner. The golf bag might be here, one never could be sure. Then, finding nothing, she passed into the library

## THE GRAY LADY

---

---

and repeated her search, then on into the great shadowy hall, all to no purpose. The golf bag was not there.

This was only what Hester had expected. It was altogether likely that Mrs. Baxter had done one of two things with the bag: either she had returned it to Miss Thompson, in which case it was now in Betty's chamber, or, possibly, she had taken it to her own bedroom. And the conclusion was, if she was going on with her search, that the girl must now, in the dead of night, enter two rooms where defenseless women were sleeping. This was a serious matter; it meant years in prison if she were caught.

For several minutes Hester pondered this, while disconnected memories of her troubled life came and went through her mind, like pictures, memories of when she was little and of her sister Rosalie. It seemed as if now, in the darkness, she could see Rosalie's sad, tired face and loving eyes fixed on her. Well, she was doing this for Rosalie, she wanted the money for Rosalie and—she had gone pretty far already, why not go a little farther?

In this resolve the intruder moved back into the library and, without giving herself time for further hesitation, she cautiously ascended the winding stair that led to Betty Thompson's room. If the worst came, she did not believe this kind-eyed girl, her fellow country-woman, would betray her. Besides, why should there be any trouble? It was only a matter of silently turning the knob. The noiseless creeping light would do the rest. If she saw the golf bag, there by the dressing-table, she could get it without a sound. And, anyway, Betty must be in her deepest sleep. It would take more than the squeak of a board or the crack of a too tense

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

knee-joint to rouse her. None of which reasoning availed, for now, when Hester turned the knob and pressed, she found an unyielding barrier against her; the door was locked.

So that was settled. If the golf bag was in Betty Thompson's chamber it must stay there. She would take no risks of picking a lock and—perhaps this wasn't her lucky night. Perhaps she had better fade away before anything went wrong.

Crouching on the lower step of the stair, Hester heard the chimes ring out the third quarter before two. Only fifteen minutes since she began her search! Should she make one more effort? Should she try Mrs. Baxter's room and, if nothing came of that, then stop for the night? It wasn't likely both women would lock their doors.

The girl was perfect in the geography of the house. Mrs. Baxter's room was one flight up by the main staircase, the second door on the right going down the hall. It was easy enough to go to this door and—very well, she would go there and then decide. No great harm could come from listening at a door. Alas! One never knows how harm may come!

Swiftly and silently the restless searcher glided through the great hall, then up the massive stairs of heavy polished oak, finding her way through the darkness by the guiding flashes of her lamp. But when she reached the head of the stairs and turned cautiously down the corridor, she stopped with a frightened gasp, for there, beyond her, spreading under the second door, Mrs. Baxter's door, was a band of light. And even as she stood, hesitating, her fears were increased by the sound of footsteps in the bedroom. Not only was

## THE GRAY LADY

---

Mrs. Baxter awake, she was coming toward the door.

Like a flash and noiselessly, the Storm girl darted on and vanished into the black depths of the corridor beyond. If the mistress of the house had heard her on the stairs, it was toward the stairs that she would go now, so the safest place was away from the stairs. Trembling and breathless the girl shrank behind some heavy curtains at the end of the hall and waited.

A moment later the door opened and Mrs. Baxter appeared in a long loose garment and carrying a candle. The light was full on her face, which was deathly white and bore, Hester thought, a look of terror. And, as the lady moved down the corridor, holding her flickering taper, she seemed to shrink away from the black shadows around her. And when she reached the stairs she hurried down with furtive glances behind, as if she felt herself pursued. What trouble or mystery was here?

The girl listened until Mrs. Baxter's footsteps sounded in the hall below, then she followed softly and, leaning over the railing, watched the movements of the candle. It disappeared into the library and presently there came the sound of an opening door. Mrs. Baxter had gone through into the conservatory. What could she want in the conservatory at this time of night? Could she suspect there was an intruder in the house? Was it this that caused her fears? Impossible! No woman would leave her room to meet a hidden burglar. She would scream; she would alarm the house; she would do anything but face the dangers lurking in a shadowy conservatory.

Then what was the explanation? Why had Mrs. Baxter, with pallid face and haunted eyes, gone down those stairs? She must be searching for something that she



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

needed very much. Strange, that there should be two women in this house searching for something that they needed very much! And, suddenly, Hester realized that here was her chance to look into Mrs. Baxter's bedroom. The door was ajar, the light was still burning. One quick glance would tell her what she so much wanted to know.

There! The door opened noiselessly as she pressed it back. Not a sound from below. Now, then! The girl stepped into the chamber and looked about her. On a small table at the head of the rumpled bed lay a book, face downward, by a shaded lamp. Mrs. Baxter had evidently been trying to read herself to sleep. Some exciting story, no doubt, that had made her wider awake than ever.

Hester moved softly about the room, looking in every corner, flashing her light into closet and bathroom, then she came out softly into the hall. The golf bag was not there.

Well, this finished her effort for the night. She had had no luck and—the best thing she could do was to get out of the house. What could that woman be doing down in the conservatory?

Again Hester listened at the stairs, but her straining ears caught no sound nor could her eyes perceive the faintest glow from Mrs. Baxter's candle. Absolute darkness! Absolute silence!

And now, with infinite precautions, the girl descended the stairs, feeling her way, for she dared not use her light. She was taking a risk, but she might be taking a greater risk by staying upstairs. She had a vague feeling that something was about to happen in this vast, gloomy house or that something already had happened.

## THE GRAY LADY

---

She felt herself stifling. At any cost she must escape from these confining walls, she must get out under the open stars where she could breathe. And she remembered, with a clutch of fear, that old Mrs. Pottle had spoken of a haunted room in Ipping House whence a gray lady came forth at night and wandered through the halls, a gray lady whose coming was attended by clanking chains and sounds as of a heavy body dragging.

Even as these gruesome thoughts chilled her heart the girl's foot touched the lowest stair and a moment later, as she stepped out gropingly into the black hall, she felt herself held from behind, as by a hand, whereupon, in a burst of terror, she tore herself violently free. At the same instant there resounded through the house a great clanking of metal and the crash of a heavy body falling. Then silence again, while Hester stood still frozen with fear. And now, from the direction of the conservatory, there came a piercing, agonized shriek.

It was an emergency to daunt the stoutest heart, but Hester rose to it, conquering her panic, because she realized that she must conquer it. Everything depended upon what she did in the next few minutes: her happiness, her freedom, her whole existence depended upon her getting out of this house immediately. Some frightful thing had happened that would presently throw the whole establishment into tumult.

Another shriek rang through the house, a pitiful cry of distress and call for help. What could be happening? Hester herself was moved to bring succor to this poor lady, but she checked her impulse as the sense of her own danger came to her with the quick opening of a door overhead and the sound of heavy footsteps on the

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

stairs. It was Robert Baxter, hurrying down from second floor, and calling as he came:

"Mother! Where are you? What is it?" he cried and Hester heard him turn down the corridor on first floor. He was going to his mother's room. There he had found it empty. He was rushing back to stairs.

"Mother!" he shouted again. "Where are you?"

Huddled in the hall below, Hester thought of front door, but she knew it was chained and bolted. There was no time to escape that way. Already Robert was on the stairs, descending slowly in the darkness. It was lucky he had not stopped to get a candle.

Swiftly the Storm girl retreated into the library. Her case was desperate. Mrs. Baxter was in the conservatory, so her escape that way was blocked. To leave the house now would be madness. It was only a matter of minutes when the whole household would be aroused, when lights would be blazing in every room and——

Then came the inspiration. It was a wild, desperate chance, but she must take it. A few moments before she had noticed a motor veil left by some one on the day port. She snatched this up and, moving silently toward the conservatory, draped it over her face and figure. The veil was of elastic, filmy material, long and wide. It covered the girl from head to foot, shrouding her in silver gray.

At the open door leading into the conservatory Hester paused and, settling her ghostly draperies about her, stood still. Through the crack of the door she could see Mrs. Baxter in the conservatory, rigid with fright, holding her candle and staring wide-eyed before her.

## THE GRAY LADY

---

---

"Mother!" called the young man for the third time. "Speak to me! Where are you?" He was stumbling about in the dark hall.

This time Eleanor heard the comforting voice of her son and tried to answer.

"Bob!" she cried faintly, and staggered toward the library door. "Bob!" she called, louder, and took a step into the shadowy room. Then, as the candle light flamed forward, she came, suddenly, face to face with a still figure, a shrouded, sinister woman in gray. It was too much. It was more than Eleanor Baxter could bear. With a stifled moan she sank down on the library floor and was conscious of nothing more until she opened her eyes weakly and found Bob bending over her.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

**A**S regards the gray lady whose seeming apparition had spread such wide alarm, anyone curious to know something of the ghostly Ladye Ysobel Ippyngge (she was believed to have been poisoned by her husband, Sir Gyles Ippyngge, Knight, and first earl of Ippingford in the early part of the twelfth century) will find a true account of her pious life and tragic death in a volume entitled, "Kronicon Uxorium," in the Bodleian library of Oxford, written by the monk Abel of Ipswich and printed in London in 1529.

The pious Lady Ysobel would have been sore distressed had she known what a fearful pothor her counterfeit presentment (by Hester Storm) would one day cause. What had really happened was perfectly simple, although the consequences were complicated and far-reaching. When Hester came to the bottom of the stairs she had turned out of her way in the darkness and passed close to a pedestal supporting a suit of armor that kept impressive guard there in the ancestral hall. So close had she passed that the cord of her electric lamp had caught on one of the links in the coat of mail, whereupon, in her plunge away from this ghostly restraint, she had toppled over the grim warrior, pedestal and all, with a crash and rattle of his various resounding parts that had alarmed the entire establishment.

## FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

---

---

This uproar had terrified Mrs. Baxter all the more as she was already quivering with superstitious dread after reading that creepy tale of Bulwer Lytton's, "Strange Story"; in fact, it was to seek relief from an obsession that the agitated lady had gone down for some sulphonal sleeping tablets that she had in the conservatory. And the silent, silver-draped figure, looming suddenly in the shadows, had done the rest.

For the Storm girl it was an incredibly narrow escape. A mere matter of seconds decided her fate. If young Hester had carried a candle she would have been discovered.

If Mrs. Baxter's candle had not been extinguished at the lady's fall she would also have been discovered.

As it was, Hester had time to flee across the conservatory and out into the park (by the underground door) before Bob, blundering and stumbling through the hall and library, had reached his fainting chair.

It may be added that Hester's quick impersonation of the gray lady was not entirely inspirational. She had told old Mrs. Pottle refer to the specter that haunted Ipping House that very evening; and, while she watched the lodge for the Baxter automobile, her thoughts had turned to the shivery legend when she heard An Petrovitch with motherly tenderness, putting to bed the four "ladies" (who seemed wakeful) and assuring them "the gray lady would tum and det them," if they would go to sleep.

It must not be supposed, however, that either the gray lady or her understudy, Hester Storm, was responsible for the series of happenings at Ipping House which ended in converting that comfortably appointed

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

English home into as uncompromising a wilderness, as far as the relatives were concerned, as the most resourceful Swiss Family Robinson could hope to be wrecked upon. There was another agency at work; to-wit, Parker.

Parker, at this particular time, was the only indoors man at Ipping House, his rank being that of butler, footman, and valet combined. For sympathetic and politic reasons, Parker had given notice on the very same day that Mrs. Edge had received her congé from Mr. Baxter.

In appearance Parker was of the candle-complexioned, patent-leather-haired type that nature seems to have distributed impartially between the pulpits and pantries of Great Britain. Parker's greatest personal asset was a subtle fluidity of temperament which caused visitors at a house where he had been engaged only the week before to believe that he was an old family retainer. It was to this priceless gift that Parker owed his success in New York, where he had spent ten profitable years and adorned many expensive houses, seldom staying long in any one place as new accessories to social elegance outbid each other for his services. It was in New York that Parker's face took on its expression of impeccable superiority, the envy of more than one bishop, an expression acquired through his practice of combining with his office of butler (for an extra charge, of course) that of private tutor of social usages to his employers.

In the eyes of Mrs. Edge, and to quote her own words, Parker was the "cream of gentlemen." Between Mrs. Edge and the "cream of gentlemen" there was an understanding. When the Baxters returned to New

York in the autumn and the house would be closed for the winter, a small but desirable hotel at Inwich (the next village beyond Millbrook) would be reopened under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Parker.

Hiram Baxter, in spite of his homely American speech, which grated painfully on the butler's fine cockney ear, somehow commanded the respect of this "cream of gentlemen," who felt that there was good material in him. He would like to have taken Baxter in hand. He longed to tell him that detachable cuffs and collars were not permissible; that a black bow tie, if one must wear such a thing in the daytime, should not have its ends tucked under the flaps of the collar. Twice Parker had deliberately hidden the silver clasps with which Hiram suspended his serviette to the lapels of his coat.

"It's fortunate they don't have no English visitors, leastways none that matters," had been Parker's reflection. Had it been otherwise his sense of fastidious shame would have compelled him to give notice. Not even that '66 brandy, upon the question of whose merits Parker and Anton were in such perfect accord, could have induced him to stay.

And now he was turning his back on these liquid joys and two months' wages into the bargain. To be separated from Mrs. Edge was out of the question. She was his fiancée, also the lease of the "Golden Horseshoe" was in her name. The wily Parker, however, saw in the ghost incident a way of visiting his resentment on the Baxter household, and he set about it at once.

At the time of the night alarm Parker had been the first to reach the hall from the servants' wing, and, striking a match, had discovered the figure in armor



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

lying on its face. With an instinctive alacrity, born from former kindly and remunerative ministrations to elderly gentlemen who had "dined," Parker lifted the helpless dummy to his feet and replaced the helmet, which had rolled some distance along the oak floor.

A moment later, when Bob appeared, supporting his mother to the stairs, the butler heard Mrs. Baxter claim with hysterical triumph: "There, you can see for yourself, Bob, it wasn't the armor; it's standing up as if it never fell down at all——"

Bob raised his candle to inspect the warrior. "I don't see how you pick up the armor, Parker?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Robert; it was standing up just like it is now, sir."

"You can go back to bed, Parker. I'll take a turn around the house myself. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir; thank you, sir."

The next day at noon the cook and the first and second housemaids gave three days' notice. It was thought advisable not to tell Eleanor, and, after a consultation with Hiram, Betty engaged a new cook and one housemaid by telephone from a London agency.

That afternoon the cook confided to the laundress, in a frightened whisper, that she had been told in strict secrecy by Parker, who got it from Gibson, Mrs. Baxter's maid, that Mrs. Baxter had a white mark on her forehead she would carry to her grave, made by the icy fingers of the Gray Lady. The story spread among the servants like an epidemic.

As night came on the last remnant of courage accumulated in the daylight oozed away, the frightened females refused to be separated and passed the night on sofas and chairs in the servants' parlor.

As for Mrs. Baxter, the shock she had received was no mean tribute to Hester's histrionic power. Nothing could remove from Eleanor's mind the conviction that she had actually beheld the supernatural shape of Lady Ysobel Ippynge, dead and buried these hundreds of years.

Mingled with her physical distress, there was a childish sense of outrage in that, having survived a unique and painful adventure, she should, by its belittlement, be robbed of the distinction she felt to be her due.

"If," reasoned the aggrieved lady, "the shock to my nerves isn't proof enough that I have really seen a ghost, then it is because of my great self-control; and all the thanks you get for self-control is to be told that you have nothing the matter with you."

Very well, she would cease to cast this pearl of self-control before the swine of unsympathy. She would let them know how really ill she was. And so, aggravated by the well-meant but irritating optimism of her family, Eleanor Baxter's "nerves" grew daily worse until, on the afternoon of her third day in bed, Hiram telephoned to a nerve specialist in London, who took the first train for Ippingford and informed the suffering lady, after a careful examination, that she was on the verge of complete nervous prostration. This was the first sensible remark Eleanor had heard for a week.

"Don't give yourself a moment's worry, Mr. Baxter," said the doctor, as Hiram put him aboard the train. "All your wife really needs is a change of air. Better take her down to Brighton."

"Hm! Brighton! Swell place by the sea, ain't it?"

"It's quite a fashionable resort, just what Mrs. Baxter needs."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"No ghosts there?" chuckled the big fellow.

"No ghosts," laughed the doctor, as he waved farewell.

Hiram sent Bob back in the automobile and walked home. With this mention of Brighton there had come to him an idea that he wanted to work out, an idea having to do with his general plan of reducing expenses. If a stay at the seashore was what Eleanor needed, why not give her enough of it, say a fortnight or a month? And, if they were going to be away a month, why not close Ipping House and get rid of a raft of servants? And why not—— then frowning he thought of his relatives and of his favorite purpose regarding them as he had outlined it to the Bishop of Bunchester, and then he thought apprehensively of Eleanor.

"Holy cats!" he muttered. "It's goin' to be a job, but I'll do it."

That evening, after dinner, he went to his wife's room and asked her carelessly how she would like to go down to Brighton for a week or two. Eleanor beamed. She would love it. Was he really going to take her? How soon? Could they stay a whole fortnight in Brighton?

Hiram assured her most considerately that they could stay a whole month in Brighton, if she wished. And they would start the next day. She had been through a great strain. It was no joke to see a ghost, he understood that. They ought to have known better than to take a house that had a ghost in it. And then, as tactfully as he could, the old boy came around to his point that it might be just as well to close Ipping House and——and give the ghost a rest.

## FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

---

Eleanor's eyes narrowed dangerously as she watched him from her lace pillow.

"Close Ipping House?" she repeated in a cold, even tone. "Do you realize what you are saying?"

Hiram took off his glasses and polished them with his handkerchief, first blowing on them deliberately.

"Sure I do; that's why I'm sayin' it. If we shut this house we can fire the servants, all of 'em; then, when we come back we can get new ones, half as many and twice as good. Don't look at me that way, dearie. I hate like everything to disappoint you, but——" he reached over and stroked her white hand tenderly, "you know what I said about expenses? Well, I meant it then and I mean it now. We've got to economize."

"What about my relatives? Our guests?" the wife demanded angrily.

"I guess your relatives 'll have to take their chances in a new deal, Eleanor. I'm goin' to have a little talk with 'em to-morrow morning. I told 'em at dinner. Don't worry, I ain't goin' to say a thing but what's for their good. Bet ye three dollars and a half, when ye hear my little speech——"

"Hear your speech?" she blazed. "Do you think anything could induce me to be present while you humiliate members of my family? I think it's abominable."

"Hold on! There ain't anything humiliating in a little honest work."

"Work?" she gasped. "Hiram, you don't mean—you're not going to put my relatives—to work?"

Hiram shifted his legs with exasperating calmness, pulled at his short, gray mustache, and was about to reply, when Robert strolled in cheerily and went at once to Eleanor's bedside.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"How's the little mother to-night?" he asked affectionately. Whereupon, to his surprise and to Hiram's great discomfiture, the lady burst into a flood of tears.

"I'm so unhappy," she wailed. "Your father is treating me most—unkindly and—and——" her words were lost in hysterical sobbing.

Whereupon Baxter stalked out of the room like a rumped Newfoundland dog, leaving Bob to administer filial comfort and smelling salts, the result being that Eleanor was presently able to give her a son a tearful version of Hiram's iconoclastic purposes. Bob listened with an amused and incredulous smile.

"Don't you know, Mother," he reasoned, "that Dad's bark is always worse than his bite? He won't close Ipping House! not a bit of it. I'll talk to him and—what you need is sleep, especially if you're going to Brighton to-morrow."

"I suppose you're right," sighed Eleanor. "You're a dear boy, Bob. Send Gibson here. Tell her to bring a hot water bag and my sulphonal tablets. And do speak to your father. Tell him I can't bear it if he closes Ipping House."

"I'll tell him. Good-night, little Mother. There! It's going to be all right." He kissed her lovingly and stole out of the room.

A few moments later young Baxter joined his father in the library, where the old man was frowning over important papers that he had brought up from town with him that evening. Things were going badly, the news from America was most unsatisfactory, and the father and son, weary and troubled, sat discussing it until long after midnight.

"There's some devilry behind all this," declared the

## FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

---

---

grizzled old fellow, pounding his fist on the table. "There's crooked work in this copper campaign. Why, that Henderson outfit seems to know what we're doing every day, just as if they had eyes in this room. I tell you there's a leak, Bob, but——" he glowered about the spacious walls under his heavy, black brows.

"Are you sure of this new secretary?" whispered the son.

Hiram's eyes softened, as they rested on the winding stair. "Am I sure of her? Sure of *her*?" Then with a chuckle: "Say, what do you think of my new secretary?"

Bob answered quite seriously: "She seems to be a nice girl, but she's too pretty."

"Think so?"

"I don't believe in very pretty girls for business positions."

"Don't, eh? Well, you can take it from me, my boy, that this partic'lar pretty girl is all right."

Bob glanced at his watch, then rose and stretched himself.

"Half-past two! We can't do any more to-night, Dad. By the way," he suddenly remembered his promise to his mother, "you're not thinking of closing Ipping House?"

Hiram was silent a moment, then, slipping his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, he spoke with a wise drawl.

"Bob, after you've been married a while you'll find that a man thinks a lot o' things and then, when his wife gets at him with the water-works, why he just takes it out in thinkin'."

"Then Ipping House stays open—just as it is."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"There may be some modifications in the 'just as it is' part of it, but—well, yes, Ipping House stays open."

"I'm glad of that. And the relatives? You're not really going to put the relatives to work, are you?"

Hiram closed his jaws with a vigorous snap. "Am I? You just show up in this library to-morrow morning right after breakfast and watch me give the English aristocracy a little of Hiram Baxter's first aid to the injured. Good-night, Son."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PARABLE OF THE COCOANUT PIE

**T**HERE was fluttering anticipation among the relatives as they gathered in the breakfast room the next morning and dallied with broiled kidneys and anchovy toast while awaiting Baxter's summons. Which came presently when Hiram, red-faced and genial of visage, opened the door.

"If you folks don't mind," he said, "I wish you'd join me in the library for a little friendly talk."

At last the great moment had come, and, one by one, the relatives passed through the hall into the room beyond, each showing in face and manner an overbubbling delight at the thought of the benefits they expected to receive from Cousin Hiram. And, one by one, they seated themselves in the stiff, high-backed chairs that were ranged along the wall. Baxter settled himself on the corner of the davenport and faced them. His eyes were cheerful, his smile was cordial; there was not the least indication of what was coming.

"Make yourselves comfortable, friends," began Hiram. "I've got a few things to say, and ye might as well take it easy."

There was a shifting of positions, a little expectant coughing, and then, just as Baxter was about to begin, Harriet Merle prodded Horatio, who was staring absentmindedly before him.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"Horatio!" she whispered.

The curate came to himself with a start, blinked rapidly behind his glasses, and then, remembering the duty his wife had put upon him, rose solemnly to his feet and, in his most clerical manner, addressed Hiram Baxter.

"Ahem! Mr. Baxter! In the name of the relatives gathered here, allow me to extend to you our most cordial welcome on this occasion of your return to England, together with the expression of our gratitude for your large and unfailing generosity in the past and—er—ahem!"

"Hear, hear!" applauded Lionel.

But Hiram lifted a hand for silence. "One moment, Brother Horatio," he drawled. "Before ye wind up yer speech, ye'd better let me make a few remarks. Ye may want to change yer peroration."

"How delightful!" murmured Harriet.

"Go on, Cousin Hiram," urged Kate.

"Hear, hear!" repeated Lionel.

"Ahem!" coughed the curate and sat down.

"I've called you people in here," continued Baxter, "to tell ye something that I've been thinkin' about fer quite a while. We're goin' to Brighton to-day, Eleanor and me, fer a couple o' weeks—this ghost business has broke Eleanor up a good deal—and I want to get this thing off my chest before I leave. Yer all good friends o' mine and yer all more or less in hard luck. Seems like things naturally go wrong with ye—it's been so fer years, ever since I've had the honor o' belongin' to this family. Well, a man hates to see his wife's relations suffer and I've tried to do what I could, but—I'm here to tell ye now that I don't feel as if I've ever done the

## THE PARABLE OF THE COCOANUT PIE

---

right thing by ye. No, sir. All these years I've tried to help ye out of yer troubles, but I've never turned the trick."

"Oh, I say!" protested Lionel.

"You've been splendid," Kate declared.

"We wouldn't have you any different, dear Cousin Hiram," beamed Harriet.

Baxter paused a moment and adjusted his spectacles. "Think I'm a pretty good feller, don't ye? Well, yer wrong. Look at my friend, Fitz-Brown, my wife's second cousin once removed. Up to his ears in debt—always has been. Ain't that a shame! My wife's second cousin once removed!"

The old boy leaned forward earnestly, his big, strong chin on his big, strong hand and in his kindly, homely way addressed the gentleman in question who was pulling fiercely at his yellow mustache.

"Now, friend Lionel, I'm goin' to show ye how ye can always have money enough and never have any more debts or bother."

This roused the monocled one to genuine enthusiasm. "I say, I'll be awfully pleased," he responded.

"I'll do it. And I'm goin' to show you," Hiram Baxter turned sharply to the curate, "how you can cure that tired feelin' and hold a preachin' job for more'n five consecutive minutes."

"Oh, thank you, sir," murmured Horatio.

"And I'm goin' to show you ladies how to be happy. Yes, sir. Trouble with you is yer bored to death. That's why ye want to go kitin' around to Monte Carlo and Jerusalem. I'll fix it so ye can't ever be bored."

"I wish you could," laughed Kate.

"My dear Countess," reproved Harriet, "if Cousin

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

Hiram agrees to do a thing you can depend upon him absolutely."

"It ain't necessary to go into details, but each one of you knows what ye've had from me straight and regular every year for the last five years. It makes quite a total, ten thousand pounds or more, fifty thousand dollars that I've spent tryin' to get you people on yer feet, and I ain't ever been able to do it. Each year yer in worse'n the year before, and it's all my fault. Want to know why? Because I've been tryin' to help ye on the European plan, which ain't worth shucks; but I've had my eyes opened, and now I'm goin' to change and help ye on the good old-fashioned American plan, warranted never to fail."

"Yes?"

"Tell us!"

"Please tell us!"

"Hear, hear!" buzzed the eager chorus.

Then came the first intimation of the truth, slowly and smilingly delivered, but bringing shattering disillusion, nevertheless, to the trusting relatives: "The American plan of helpin' people consists in showin' 'em how they can help themselves."

The effect came gradually in a movement of general surprise and consternation.

"Oh, I say!"

"But——"

"You don't mean—you surely don't mean——"

"Tell ye exactly what I mean. Yer all nice people, but ye've been trained wrong. Your idea is to sit in the sunshine and let somebody shake plums into yer lap, which is all right if ye can find a feller to do it, but I'm tired o' shakin' plums and the tree's pretty well

## THE PARABLE OF THE COCOANUT PIE

---

skinned, so——” Here he turned to the countess and Harriet with his most ingratiating smile: “Ladies, I want to ask you a question. Suppose you were on a desert island and were gettin’ terribly hungry, and suppose ye looked up and saw some nice, ripe cocoanuts waitin’ to be picked. You’d say to yourselves: ‘Them cocoanuts look awful good,’ and ye’d ring like fury for the butler and the maid to come and pick ’em and make ’em into cocoanut pies. But the butler and the maid wouldn’t show up, because yer on a desert island—uninhabited. See? So after a while ye’d get tired o’ ringin’ and ye’d say to the countess——” here he beamed on Mrs. Merle, “‘Countess,’ ye’d say, ‘it ain’t according to Hoyle fer ladies to climb cocoanut trees, but this is a case of hustle or starve, so we’ll flip up a cent to see which one of us boosts the other into them branches.’”

“Never,” declared the curate’s wife, scandalized.

“Yes, ye would!” pursued Hiram. “And before night ye’d be eatin’ the finest cocoanut pie ye ever tasted, for——” he paused and then added with his most impressive drawl: “Take it from me, ladies, there ain’t no pie in the world like a self-made pie.”

This statement was received in silence, in thin-lipped, despairing silence. Slowly but surely the relatives were beginning to get dear Cousin Hiram’s idea.

“Ahem! Mr. Baxter!” coughed Horatio, rising again. “In the name of the relatives gathered here, allow me to thank you for the beautiful—shall I say touching—parable of the cocoanut pie. I think, however, that I voice the desire of the relatives gathered here in asking you to make your ideas a little clearer in their—shall I say in their immediate application?”

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"All right, Brother Horatio," smiled Hiram, as the curate resumed his seat. "I'll come down to cases. We're members o' the same family and we've got to stand together."

"Ah!" approved Harriet.

"Just now it happens that I need your help. I've got big resources, but I'm in a hard campaign. I've got my back to the wall fighting for my life and—well, we'll come through all right and you'll benefit with me, but for a while we've got to cut down on expenses and—er—you people'll have to—er——"

The bolt was about to fall, the words were on Hiram's lips: "You people'll have to do some work," but as he looked into the faces before him, pathetic, incredulous, the old fellow weakened. "You people'll have to—er—give this thing your—er—serious consideration," he substituted.

But the countess understood, and, with a little laugh and a shrug of her shapely shoulders, she came straight to the point. "You mean we'll have to—have to—work?"

Hiram nodded slowly.

"Understand, there's no hurry about this. I want to treat ye right. I want to help ye. I want to see yer faces bright and yer needs provided for, but I can tell ye this, from a long experience, that the thing in my life that's made me happiest is the honest work I've done. Remember, things go on here in Ipping House just the same, whatever you folks decide. If ye can't think of anything practical to do, why, never mind. I'll stand by ye as well as I can; but if ye could think o' something that yer fitted to do and could put yer heart in, why it would solve your problems and it'd

## THE PARABLE OF THE COCOANUT PIE

live mine. You'll be sore on me for a while, like that sputters and kicks and swallows a quart of when you chuck him in a pond to learn him to

iet's face was a study in horror. "Good heavens, not going to——"

ck us in a pond? Eh, what?" gasped Lionel.

no. I mean work is like swimmin'. Ye hate it e learn how and then yer crazy about it. Why, ople'll feel just fine when ye've cut out this bluff ke business. Do ye know what a little useful do? It'll make men and women of ye."

what work can we do?" protested the count-

y good point, that," echoed Lionel.

m reflected a moment.

ppose there are things you folks could do, if l to, plenty o' things. Maybe I'm mistaken, it's a crazy idea, but——"

suddenly the curate spoke. "I think Mr. Bax- quite right," he began in a low tone vibrant with

ratio!" glared Mrs. Merle, but the little man er calmly.

dear, I beg you not to interrupt." Then, turn- the master of the house: "Speaking for myself," tinued, "and not for the relatives gathered here, to say that, in view of your great past kindness, or Mr. Baxter, I feel that you are justified, fully d, in asking us to help you meet the serious and, hope, temporary difficulties that beset you. And I remind the relatives gathered here of King Solo- beautiful and impressive words: 'Whoso keepeth

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

the fig trees shall eat the fruit thereof, and whoso waiteth on his master shall be honored.' ”

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. Disapproving as they were, and bitterly disappointed, the relatives, in spite of themselves, were impressed by a certain unsuspected moral strength in this gentle utterance.

“King Solomon cert'ly knew his business,” approved Hiram, as much surprised as the others at this turn of affairs.

“And I beg to suggest,” proceeded Merle, appealing to the astonished group, “as the least important and the least worthy person here, yet one who has sincerely at heart the welfare of all, I venture to suggest that, before any hasty words are spoken or any irrevocable action is taken by the relatives gathered here, I would suggest, I say, that the relatives withdraw to their rooms or elsewhere for a little—er—thought and—shall I say self-examination?”

“Good idea! Fine idea!” nodded Baxter, and a moment later, with a quizzical look in his cheery blue eyes, he watched the relatives file out silently, one by one, a mighty sore bunch, he reflected, mouths down and noses up, Horatio going last and bowing respectfully to Hiram as he closed the door behind him.

For some moments the old man sat in the corner of the davenport, smiling at this latest development. Who would have thought of it? The Reverend Merle a champion of honest labor! Standin' up like a little bantam rooster against them relatives!

Presently Bob entered, eager for news.

“Well?” inquired the son.

“Bob,” drawled the big fellow, “I'll bet ye four dol-

## THE PARABLE OF THE COCOANUT PIE

---

lars and a quarter King Solomon wrote them proverbs o' his after he'd been worked by relatives. Say, with a thousand wives he must have had an everlasting lot of 'em!"

An hour later the luggage cart appeared for the three large boxes, the two steamer trunks and the assortment of Gladstone bags, hold-alls, and dress-suit cases that Eleanor had caused to be packed for their brief and simple sojourn in Brighton. Some of these things, it is true, belonged to Betty, whose services were required by Mr. Baxter, and who now appeared, ready for the journey, a radiant summer vision all in white except for a bunch of pansies at her waist and a graceful, pale-blue plume in the wide-brimmed straw hat that becomingly shaded her eyes.

The car drew up at the door, coughing and sputtering, with Bob Baxter at the wheel. Hiram sat in front beside his son, Eleanor and Betty on the seat behind. And, just as they were starting, Kate Clendennin tripped down the steps and, declining to squeeze in among the bags and bundles, leaped lightly upon the footboard at Bob's side and remained there, despite Eleanor's protest, all the way to the station.

Poor Betty! There was a moment's delay in starting the train, after the guard had given the signal and slammed the doors, and the banished secretary, looking backward through the window, caught a glimpse of the departing motor as it rounded the nasturtium bed. Kate was on the front seat next to Bob, and they both looked back, the countess laughing and waving her hand. Then the car turned a wooded corner, and that was the last picture—Kate and Bob together, close together, gliding swiftly, perhaps slowly, through those leaf-arched lanes



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

and delicious lonesome glades of the forest. They had taken the longer way home, but there was time enough—there was not the slightest need for Kate and Bob to hurry.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE FOUR POTTLES

**K**ATE and Harriet went straight to their bedrooms, Harriet to rehearse her part in the forthcoming scene with Horatio; Kate, in an angry fever, to ring for Gibson to pack her boxes without a moment's delay. She rang several times before a housemaid appeared and informed her ladyship that Gibson was nowhere to be found. There was a suppressed eagerness about the girl, as if she had something further to disclose, something unusual, but Kate did not question her, and she left the room, closing the door reluctantly behind her.

On the table near the bed lay a yellow, paper-backed book, open and face downward, in unseemly straddle, as Kate had left it the day before to keep the place. It was a collection of stories by a new French author. She picked it up and began slowly turning the pages.

Still reading, she sat down on the bed. In a little while she lifted her feet and lay back without taking her eyes from the book. Half an hour later the yellow book lay on the floor where Kate had flung it. How could anyone write such trash!

Alone in her room Harriet waited for Horatio. Since the tragedy of the afternoon before, the husband and wife had scarcely spoken, and Harriet welcomed a storm to relieve the charged atmosphere. She was ready with

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

her opening speech and she knew what Horatio must inevitably reply, and she had prepared a crushing rejoinder. But Horatio did not come.

In the mournful exodus from the library the gentle curate had been the last, holding the door open for the others, and, after softly closing it behind him, without lifting his eyes from the ground, he had passed, unseeing and unseen, through the hall and out into the sunlit garden.

Scarcely noticing and caring not at all where he went, Horatio found himself in the lane, and now, while Harriet listened in vain for his shuffling steps on the stair, the curate was a good mile and a half away in the very heart of the Millbrook woods. He had followed at random any path that offered; if there were a choice, taking the one with the darkling look that might lead to the witches' hut or the cave of the gnomes.

And now, when he was beginning to feel the creepy joy of being lost, that he had never quite outgrown, the curate came suddenly upon a bright grassy hollow among the dark trees, guarded from view on all sides by high ferns. The dark old beeches gathered round it and stretched their great elbows over it as if to keep its existence secret from all the world but one little girl. Even the sun, who was invited everywhere, was only allowed to take furtive peeps through the green fingers of the jealous old beeches. It was as if they said: "Go away! This little golden maid is all the sunshine we need, thank you!" For there, in a green velvet chair formed by the twisting mossy root of an immense beech tree, sat An Petronia.

The curate stood still in the shadow among the tall ferns, fearing to startle her. She was listening with

## THE FOUR POTTLES

---

shut eyes and parted lips. Twice through the green solitude sounded the long, intensely solemn note of a wood thrush, then it was gone, leaving behind it an echo-haunted stillness.

An Petronia opened her eyes and caught sight of the curate.

"Daddy Merle!" she called to him. "Did you hear the thrush? I wonder what he said, Daddy Merle?"

"He said, 'I wonder who that little girl is that sits all alone by herself in my private wood?'" intoned the curate. "Aren't you afraid of getting lost?" he said, as he descended the ferny slope to where she sat.

"I isn't losted. I tan't det losted. I has four Pottles."

She pointed to four dolls, in various stages of dilapidation, sitting stiffly in a row in front of her, their eight feet immersed in a trickle of water that seemed to come from nowhere and disappeared magically among the ferns, chuckling to itself at the success of its vanishing trick.

"Dear me," said Merle, inspecting the dolls with a profound show of interest, "I had no idea you had so many children. What are their names?" he inquired.

"They're not children," said An Petronia, "they're Pottles. Their names are Maffew, Mart, Loot, and this one," she picked up the least favored in appearance of the four, "this one is Don." She caressed him tenderly. It was plain that Don was the one she loved best, perhaps because of his great misfortune. Don was headless.

"He had real hair once, but I losted his head," An Petronia sighed deeply. "I wish I had all the Pottles, Daddy Merle."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"Then there are more?" asked the curate, wondering whither the child's strange fancy was leading her.

"Of torse there is. I had a picture of them. Don't you know the twelve Pottles, Daddy Merle?" She opened her blue eyes in pained surprise at the woeful ignorance of this otherwise perfect old gentleman.

Then a great light burst upon Horatio Merle. "Why, to be sure, my dear! Of course I know the twelve apos—I should say Pottles. I have known the twelve Pottles ever since I can remember, my child. Dear me! dear me!" His face fairly beamed with pleasure at this lucky intuition. The curate's happiness at having reinstated himself in the estimation of his little friend was only equaled by An Petronia's joy at the recovery of her so nearly lost ideal.

"I just knew you knew, Daddy Merle!" she cried, and pressed her little palms together in an ecstasy of childish delight.

"But aren't you afraid they'll catch cold?" said the curate presently, in a tone of proper concern, as An Petronia was returning the headless John to his place beside Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who still sat stoically with their feet in the water.

She shook her head gravely, almost reprovngly. "Oh, no! The Pottles is having their feet washed. They tan't tach told." Then, after a moment of pondering: "Would you like to see the picture, Daddy Merle?"

Before he could answer she had jumped up and disappeared behind the great beech tree. She had only been gone a moment when out of the stillness came a small voice: "Tum and see my little house, Daddy Merle!"

## THE FOUR POTTLES

---

It was the voice of An Petronia, but strangely muffled and far away.

Full of curiosity, Merle scrambled to his feet and peered round the tree. An Petronia was nowhere to be seen. What had become of her? Another step and the mystery was explained.

Between two of the buttresslike roots on the other side of the ancient beech was a dark fissure extending from the ground upward for three or four feet and just wide enough to form a doorway for little An Petronia. A practical woodman viewing the hollow tree that An Petronia called her "little house" would have had no thought beyond the loss of so many cubic feet of good timber and whether the tree was worth chopping down. To the gentle curate waiting in the green silence, here was a magic door through which at any moment might issue a laughing faun or a wistful dryad. As for Brother Beech, after all the only one vitally concerned, there was no tree specialist to tell him (for a substantial consideration) that he had only a very few years more to live and must avoid strong sunshine as much as possible and give up rain in excess, and above all be careful not to expose himself unnecessarily to the September blasts. And so the reckless little leaves in their gold-green finery laughed and sang and danced and feasted summer after summer just as if they were going to live forever and there were no such things as September gales.

From the inside of the tree came small, whispery, squirrel-like noises, and presently through the moss-rimmed opening stretched the hand of An Petronia, holding out a faded green, oblong package, bulging with papers and tied with white tape.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Please, Daddy Merle, will you hold it for me?"

Relieved of their burden, the hands disappeared. Merle examined the package with interest. It was the back of an old exercise book converted into a portfolio and was full of papers. He turned it over curiously. On the other side was a white label. The curate smiled as he read the inscription in childish capitals, "The Misforchins of Reginal," by An Petronia Pottle.

An Petronia's novel! It so happened that this was the first time Merle had beheld the little novelist's autograph. "What a funny way to spell Anne!" he said half-aloud.

"That's the way I always spell it, Daddy Merle." He started at the sound of An Petronia's voice. He had not heard her as she slipped out of the tree. Now she was standing close beside him and in her hands was something small wrapped in white tissue paper.

There was a timid challenge in the child's voice, the first hint of the future conflict between artist and critic.

"'An' is the very first word in my spelling-book," she hurried on, "A N—an. It's the same name, Daddy Merle, only in the speller it's An Apple and I'm An Pottle."

There was no disputing such logic as this, accompanied as it was by a rainy look that must be instantly kissed away from An Petronia's wide blue eyes.

"My dear," he said, and if the truth must be told there was a hint of rain in the curate's own eyes, "An is your very own name and the way you spell it is the sweetest and dearest way in all the world, and you must never spell it any other way," which was the first, last and only concession to the "Dire Heresy of Spelling Reform" ever made by the Reverend Horatio Merle.

## THE FOUR POTTLES

---

They were seated once more on the soft moss by the side of the four evangelists, who greeted them with undiminished apostolic serenity. An Petronia had undone the tape that bound her portfolio and was turning over the contents, pieces of paper in various sizes, from half sheets of note to torn scraps of wrapping paper, covered on both sides with the large, irregular handwriting of the budding novelist. By her side sat the curate, his gray head bent over the picture which An Petronia, after unfolding its tissue paper wrappings, had with heroically suppressed misgivings intrusted to his hands. It was her most precious possession, a photograph in a tarnished gilt frame from a painting of Christ washing the feet of the apostles. Below the picture was printed a text from the Gospel of Saint John, xiii., 15:

FOR I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN  
EXAMPLE, THAT YE SHOULD  
DO AS I HAVE DONE TO  
YOU.

The curate stared at the familiar words. Once he had preached a sermon from that very text. He smiled sadly as he recalled that sermon.

"What do these words mean?" he had asked. "Could it be possible they were ever meant to be obeyed literally? Was it not rather a piece of oriental symbolism, a parable without words teaching the lesson of humility....." If only he had ended his discourse there. If some angel of discretion had barred the way to that fateful peroration; "Not the mock humility of the imperial blasphemer who once a year descends from his throne to wash the feet of twelve disinfected beg-



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

gars . . . . .” How should he, Horatio Merle, have known that the crotchety old Rector of Deepmold not only had decided views on the sanctity of kings, but was a relation by marriage of a certain quasi-ecclesiastical person in high favor in the Austrian Emperor's household?

“You would have said it just the same, Horatio!” Harriet had declared in a burst of indignant tears as she crumpled up the rector's letter accepting Horatio's resignation. Perhaps he would—who knows?

Merle sighed regretfully as he thought of that cosy little cottage at Deepmold—the little terrace with the mossy steps—his rose garden, where he used to smoke his pipe (smoking destroyed the pernicious aphidæ) and think about his sermon. There was an old sundial on the terrace and round its stone dial Horatio had chiselled with his own hands a verse of Omar Khayyam:

“The moving finger writes and, having writ,  
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit  
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.”

Somewhere deep down in Horatio Merle was a soul stratum of fatalism, not the wine-instilled bravado of Omar; rather the inspired fatalism of one who said: “Take no thought of the morrow.”

And now, in the afternoon silence of the woods, the curate pondered on the fate that had seemed to shape his ends so unprofitably. Was there ever anyone in the world less fitted to be a clergyman than he?

Why has the silence of the summer woods been so often likened to the silence of a cathedral? They have nothing in common. The silence of the cathedral is the

## THE FOUR POTTLES

---

---

of great stones frozen together by Fear. The  
of the woods is the stillness of innumerable  
blended, as all the colors of the rainbow are  
d, into the white light which is invisible.

ddy Merle, how do you spell enjoyed?" An Pe-  
looked up from her writing.

spelled it for her slowly and she said it after

ank you, Daddy Merle."

in he found himself staring at the picture of the  
s. It fascinated him. It seemed to Merle as if  
ainter's self were speaking to him across the  
ies.

they look as if they were acting a play, these  
men that I have painted? Has the spirit of Chris-  
so changed that the sacred commands of the  
r must be explained away with strange words?  
he flock strayed so far that the shepherd's crook  
me to be only a symbol and the shears of the  
r a metaphor and the sheepfold a figure of speech?  
I painted my picture in vain?"

l now the printed words of the text before him  
d to speak aloud, to call to him:

r I have given you an example, that ye should  
I have done to you."

re was no mistake about the meaning. It was a  
and, a command to be obeyed literally. If the  
1 thought otherwise, then he must part company  
he church. He could not serve two masters. He  
ade his choice, he would obey the call. The hum-  
ne service he found to do, the more gladly would  
it. Was not that what Hiram Baxter himself  
ried to tell them in his homely way? "It will

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

make men and women of you," that's what he had said. Hiram Baxter was right.

And then a great resolve formed itself in the heart of Horatio Merle. He would take Hiram Baxter at his word, he would tell him he wanted to work. He was willing to do anything so long as it was work, so long as it was helpful. He had been blind, and in his blindness he had tried to lead others as blind as himself.

"I have lost my way," he said aloud. He had risen to his feet and stood with head bowed and hands extended in an attitude that would have been theatrical if it had not been so utterly unconscious.

"You isn't losted, Daddy Merle." He felt the clasp of her little hand. "Tum with me, I know the way."

Together they walked through the high ferns, in some places over An Petronia's head, and through dim, winding woodland passages and secret stairways of mossy rocks behind the tapestry of ivy and convolvulus known only to An Petronia, until they came out on the Millbrook lane just in time to see the last flicker of sunlight through the hawthorn hedge.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE DESERT ISLAND

THE night before the departure of the Baxters for Brighton the spectacle of a huge pile of packed boxes and the report that the family were fleeing from the doomed mansion, never to return, had had a fresh outbreak of hysterical panic among the remaining servants. And scarcely was the car out of bearing the Baxter party to the station when a deputation from the servants' hall, hatted, coated and bagged and headed by Parker, waited on Mrs. Baxter, as the senior representative of the family, and begged her that they were very sorry, but nothing would induce them to spend another hour in the house. Only for the sake of consideration for poor Mrs. Baxter had they delayed until her departure.

For the first time in her life Harriet, confronted by an emergency, totally lost the power of speech. When at length she recovered her breath and words were ready again, she found herself alone; the deputation had left the room, closing the door quietly behind itself.

Half an hour later the station-master at Ippingford happened to say that two servants who had arrived on an early train from London, on learning, at the station, of the use of the vacancy they were required to fill, had taken the first train back to town.

Harriet put up the receiver, she heard the dimin-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

ishing hiss of wheels on the damp gravel outside. The sound died away and a sudden quiet came upon Ipping House, a stillness that smote Harriet's nerves like the stillness that awakens the passengers on an ocean liner when the engines stop working in the night. To tell the truth, the situation was much the same, for with the exception of Anton, the chauffeur, Hester, the new sewing girl, and Mrs. Pottle at the lodge, there was not a single servant left at Ipping House.

"What will Horatio say?" thought Harriet.

To Harriet's utter amazement, Horatio, when told what had happened, remained perfectly calm; he even smiled. She stared at him open-mouthed.

"Horatio! Have you heard a single word I've been telling you?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Is that all you have to say?" She spoke sharply.

Horatio was removing his galoshes, muddy from a long walk. This operation had to be performed standing, as the only two chairs in the room were occupied, one by the agitated Harriet, the other by the slumbering Martin Luther.

As the curate looked up, clasping one foot in his two hands and hopping absurdly on the other to keep his balance, he resembled some fantastic bird of the crane family. At any other time Harriet might have smiled; now she was too angry. Her white pompadour bristled and her eyes blinked rapidly as if making ready to leap at him.

"It is incomprehensible," he said at length, after depositing the galoshes neatly beneath Martin Luther's chair. "It is incomprehensible, my dear, in this age of aeroplanes and cinematographs and popular education,

## THE DESERT ISLAND

---

---

it anyone should still believe in supernatural phenomena."

Only by shutting her lips tightly and gripping the arms of her chair did Harriet restrain herself from silent interruption. When she spoke it was an exclamation.

"Horatio! are you crazy? Don't you understand? There isn't a servant in this house. There's no one to make our luncheon, and, if there were, there is no one to serve it, no one to do anything, and you stand there and talk about aeroplanes!"

There was a quiet about Horatio that, exasperating as it was, somehow disconcerted Harriet. She watched him silently, resentfully, as he picked up the cushion which Martin Luther was reposing and deposited it carefully on the floor without waking the cat. Sleepily unconscious of the proximity of a sympathetic hand, Martin Luther stretched his paws and extended his neck to scratch, then curled up to sleep again without having once opened his eyes.

Seating himself in the cushionless chair, Horatio leaned his head against its tall straight back. "No one to serve, no one to do anything." He was echoing Harriet's words; his eyes were resting on hers, yet his thoughts were far away, fixed on something invisible. Harriet, a faded picture in a tarnished gilt frame.

A dim, arched room, a group of uncouth, dark-haired men seated sideways about a long table on which were strangely fashioned tankards and curious goblets. At the feet of one of these men was One who kneeled upon the stone floor. His eyes were sorrowful, His smooth hair fell heavily about his bent shoulders and, above his bowed head, there wavered a thin pale circle of

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

blue-white light. And this One who kneeled upon the stone floor was washing the feet of that other who was seated at the table.

There was a look in her husband's face that carried Harriet's thoughts far away from the present, back to the first time she had seen that look and believed that Horatio was different from any other man, believed that, with her at his side, he was destined to do great things and to help make the world a wonderful place. And what had he done? What had she done? Who was to blame for the failure, for the poverty, for the pitiful dependence? She wondered what was to become of them. How could they stay on here after the way Cousin Hiram had talked? To be sure, Cousin Eleanor had been kindness itself. She had kissed her quite tearfully that morning and hoped she and Horatio would stay with them as long as they kept the house open. She had even hinted at their visiting them in New York.

The sound of a motor below coming round the drive brought Harriet to her feet. She ran to the window.

"It's Cousin Robert and Kate Clendennin," she exclaimed. "They ought to have been back hours ago. Robert will make everything all right. I will speak to him at once about getting servants."

She moved quickly and was already half out of the room when the sound of Horatio's voice halted her like an electric shock.

"Harriet!"

There was a tone in Horatio's voice that drew Harriet back into the room as if by physical force.

"What is it, Horatio? You frightened me." She pressed the palm of her hand against her side.

He was standing before her; and the pinkness had

---

## THE DESERT ISLAND

---

gone out of his face. He took her hand and led her gently back to the chair.

"Sit down, Harriet." He seated himself in the other chair. "I'm sorry I frightened you, love, but you must not speak to Robert Baxter about the servants."

"Why not, Horatio?"

"Because—because——" He looked at her dumbly, his underlip shook and tears came into his eyes. Harriet began to be really frightened. What had happened? Why didn't he speak?

"Harriet," he went on at last, "I implore you not to speak to Mr. Baxter. I beseech you to do nothing in this matter."

"But Horatio!"

"I mean it, Harriet. What has happened in this house to-day is an answer to my prayer."

"You're going mad, Horatio!" She tried to rise, but he drew her gently back.

"If you do anything, Harriet, if you do not leave things as they are now in this house, it will be as if Christ came to the door and you slammed the door in His face."

He was terribly in earnest, his voice was steady and his blue eyes met hers calmly; in them shone a light she had loved him for in the long gone days—a light that rarely visited them now.

"Do you mean," she asked at length, "that you want us to do without any servants?"

He put his answer in the form of a question.

"Harriet, do you remember the happiest year of our life, when we had no servant at all except the char-woman who came once a week, when you made the beds and the bread and washed the dishes and I dried



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

them, when you were the cook and four housemaids in one and I was the butler and the footman and the man of all work? I opened the bottle of wine when we had one; I made the fires, except when the coal bill was overdue and there weren't any fires to make; I was the boots, too, and I cleaned the knives and polished our two or three bits of silver. And, when I'd nothing else to do, I wrote my sermons."

The color came into Harriet's face and her eyes shone at the recollection.

"You generally composed your sermon on the way to church. How you used to frighten me, Horatio! I thought every service would be your last! Do you remember the first time I locked you up on a Saturday morning to write your sermon?" she added, smiling.

"You can laugh about it now, but it was no laughing matter at the time," said Horatio. "I made up my mind I would open the Bible at random and take the first text my eye fell upon—and what a text it was! 'Can'st thou draw out leviathan with an hook?' Do you remember?"

"It was the best sermon you ever wrote," said Harriet, warming to the remembrance, "though perhaps, dear, it was a mistake to dwell on the impossibility of a whale's swallowing anything larger than a sardine."

"Well, it is true, isn't it?" argued Horatio.

"That's what you told the vicar when he took you to task for it after the service," laughed Harriet, "and what was it he said?"

Horatio puckered his face into a frown. "He informed me, Harriet, that it was the business of a curate to preach the Gospel and not to lecture on natural history."

## THE DESERT ISLAND

---

The curate rose and held out his hand. "Come on, Harriet." He drew her to him and put his arm round her affectionately. "Let's play we're back in the old stone cottage at Chale, and you go down into the larder and see if there's anything for lunch and I'll go into the dining-room and lay the cloth."

For answer Harriet, conscious of the moisture in her eyes, gave Horatio a swift sidelong peck which was to a kiss what the shorthand symbol is to a written word, and, together, they descended the echoing stairs of the deserted house.

In the meantime Robert Baxter and Kate Clendennin, returning from the railway station by what the Reverend Horatio Merle might have called a short cut of about twenty miles, took no account of the flight of time. Now they raced madly down a narrow lane whose hawthorn hedges interlaced thickly overhead. Now, as the road passed between thrush-haunted woods, they went very slowly, sometimes standing still for minutes at a time to listen to the notes of the wood birds. Once when a spotted fawn trotted out of the thicket and ambled in front of the motor, they went at half speed for nearly a mile before the frightened creature decided to take to the woods again.

In the last four or five days Kate had seen a good deal of Bob, since her confession to Lionel on the Millbrook links, and she had not over-estimated her powers. Each day he sought her company more eagerly, and while at first she had, without appearing to do so, given him opportunities, now, as far as could be, with a young man who had to give a part of his time to business in London, his movements had come to be coincidental with her own.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

But Kate knew that the time had come when she must, to put it baldly, either take him or leave him. She had told Lionel that she was going to marry Robert Baxter. That, however, was several days ago. Then her decision was not irrevocable. Now, as she sat beside Robert Baxter in the motor, Kate realized that any day, any hour, any moment it might become irrevocable.

She spoke suddenly. "We'd better be hurrying," she said. "It's getting late. I'm getting hungry, aren't you?"

On the way home Kate kept him busy with the high speed lever, declaring that if they weren't back inside of half an hour she would certainly starve to death. In less than ten minutes Bob had passed the golf links, and in three minutes more they were whizzing through the lodge gates.

Kate felt it the moment they entered the house.

"What is it?" she asked, looking round curiously.

"What's what?" said Bob, as he followed her into the hall.

"It's so beastly quiet—there's something wrong. I wonder where Lionel is," she said.

They passed into the library. Kate pulled a bell, once, twice, and once again. No one answered.

"Perhaps it didn't ring," suggested Bob.

They tried one in the conservatory, and getting no response, they descended to the regions of the kitchen to see what was the matter. With the exception of Martin Luther, fast asleep on a seat by the range, there was not a living soul to be found anywhere.

Bob took out his cigarette case, and Kate seated herself on the dresser, with her feet on a chair.

"We're marooned!" she said; the words came out of a violet smoke-cloud.

"Looks like it," said Bob as he lighted his cigarette from hers.

"I say, can you cook?" asked the voice from the cloud.

"I can make a Welsh rarebit."

"Well, I'll thank you not to." Kate volplaned from her perch on the dresser. "Let's see what there is. There's sure to be something cold, and, if there are eggs enough, I'll make an omelette a mile wide."

There were cold meats of various kinds, also cold boiled potatoes. These Kate cut up and placed in a frying pan, while Bob made a fire in the range, and, under Kate's direction, put the plates and dishes for the omelette and the potatoes in the oven to warm.

When everything was ready, Kate sent Bob upstairs to set the table and ring the gong for luncheon. As he hurried through the servants' corridor he met Mrs. Merle.

"Oh, Mr. Baxter!" she cried. "Did you ever see anything like it! I am just going down to see if I can find anything for lunch."

Bob smiled sweetly as he held the door open and ushered Mrs. Merle into the kitchen.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Harriet when she had recovered from the first shock of surprise at seeing Kate. "If I'd known sooner I might have been some help. My husband is laying the cloth."

"Splendid!" answered Kate, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Now, Bob, you can help us with the trays."

Bob led the way with a large tray on which were a cold ham and a platter of sliced cold chicken. Kate

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

carried the omelette and a "sweet" she had made at the last minute of fried bread and strawberry jam. Mrs. Merle brought up the rear with the dish of fried potatoes and a jar of potted shrimps.

Horatio had just finished setting the table when the procession of three entered the dining room. His back was turned. He was making a last round, massaging with gentle finger tips the few remaining wrinkles in the white cloth.

In an instantaneous conspiracy of silence they watched him as he slowly circumnavigated the snow and crystal continent. Arrived at the antipodes, Horatio looked up quietly and met the eyes in the doorway. As they looked at him a change came over his face. He stood very straight, looking almost tall. It was happening, the miracle he had prayed for!

"For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you."

Perhaps they didn't know it. Perhaps they thought it was all a joke. But he knew better. It was part of the Great Design, just as the departure of the frightened servants were part of the same Design.

Here they came, laughing, joking, but all lending a hand, all serving. Some one was crying: "Hooray for the new butler! Speech! Speech!" It was Lionel Fitz-Brown. Returning from a ramble on the moor at the last minute, he had seen what was up, and, not wishing to be out of it, had dashed into the kitchen garden and returned, the flushed and joyous bearer of an egregious lettuce on a lordly dish.

All tongues were loosed now as they followed each other into the dining room and deposited their viands on the table.

## THE DESERT ISLAND

---

---

There was a sudden hush. All were seated but Harriet and Horatio. Harriet went quickly to her accustomed place and sat down. Only the Reverend Horatio Merle remained standing. The curate had always said grace at Ipping House, sounding forth the stereotyped words with a certain glib solemnity as if he was repeating a worn out social formula. Now on his lowered face there was a deep reverence, and his clasped hands were joined in real supplication.

“For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.” There was a tremor in his voice, but it held out to the end.

With still lowered head Horatio moved to the head of the table, and, standing by the side of Mr. Robert Baxter, lifted the cover from Kate Clendennin’s omelette and placed it on the sideboard.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

**L**ONG established usage on desert islands has ordered that the first duty of the shipwrecked, after locating the crystal spring and ascertaining that the cocoanuts are ripe and the mango (or bread fruit tree) abounds, is to signal for help. Accordingly, at this first meal after the desolation of Ipping House the sole topic of conversation concerned ways and means of obtaining new servants without delay. But the Merles took no part in the discussion.

From the outset the Reverend Horatio's domestic ministrations had been accepted, in the picnickian spirit of the occasion, as the whim of an eccentric parson and quickly forgotten by all but Harriet in the absorbing topic of the moment.

Harriet watched him now as he moved quietly to and fro, carrying the large silver platter, bending gravely as he held it in turn for each of the chatterers at the table. "Heathens" she reflected bitterly. "They are raging about menials, heedless that they are being served by an angel!"

A rare partisan was Harriet Merle. With her on his side, Horatio might well liken himself to a hero of old armed with an invincible spear. Harriet gloried in opposition, and it was only when opposing forces were equal that there was any doubt in her husband's mind which

## THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

---

side she would take. At such times something totally unexpected, weighing with the infinitesimal preponderance of a hair, would sway the balance. So it had been this morning when Horatio had spoken of long ago days and the look of long ago had shone in Horatio's eyes.

An hour before, if the priestly Ezekiel himself had appeared to the curate's wife and prophesied that she would soon be abetting her husband in this, the maddest of his mad ideas, Harriet would in all probability have shown the presentient son of Buzi to the door. (Hiram Baxter would have told him he was talking through his halo.) Yet now that very thing was actually happening, and the strangest part of it was that it did not seem strange to her.

As Horatio stood, with his back to the room, occupied with things on the sideboard, there was to Harriet something solemnly familiar about his attitude, his quiet movements. Nor was the good churchwoman shocked when she realized what it recalled to her mind. It was but an added proof, if such were needed, that to Horatio this was indeed a ritual, and no common service he was performing.

At last, it seemed an age to Harriet, every one had been served. The Spanish omelette, a martyr to its own perfection was no more. Robert Baxter, after paying the highest compliment possible for a mere man to pay to a Spanish omelette, rose from the table and, deputing the countess to act with Mrs. Merle in the matter of engaging servants, excused himself on the plea of letters that must catch the afternoon post.

A moment later Horatio, steeling himself against Harriet's imploring glance and the appeal of his untouched plate, left the room. As one on the brink of a journey,



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

the thought of food repelled him. Also he remembered that Martin Luther had not breakfasted. He would come back later and help Harriet clear away the things.

Kate had lighted a cigarette and was leaning back in her chair watching the sinuous veil dance of the dissolving vapor. Lionel's whole being was concentrated on the ordeal by fire of a perfecto bequeathed to him by the departing Robert.

"By Jove! Where's Mr. Merle?" he asked.

The countess, immediately alert, gave a quick glance round the table. "Go after him, Lionel. He's had nothing to eat!" she cried.

Lionel pushed back his chair and strode out of the room. Some minutes passed before he returned, entering by the French window from the conservatory. He looked flustered.

"I can't find him anywhere," he said quickly, in answer to exclamations from Harriet and Kate. "I've looked all over the beastly house and I'm blest if I know where he can have got to."

"He must have gone out," suggested the countess.

"That's the first thing I thought of. He hadn't two minutes' start of me, and I ran all round the house."

"Did you go to the lodge?" queried Harriet.

"Yes, I went there twice. No one has been through the gate since this morning. By the way," he added, "Mrs. Pottle says she'll come around and see what she can do to help, she and that girl she has there, jolly looking girl,—eyes like a—like a fox terrier—" He stopped abruptly. Kate and Harriet had not waited for particulars about the Storm girl's eyes—the one was speeding toward the kitchen, the other was already half way up stairs.

## THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

---

Search as they would, the Reverend Horatio was nowhere to be found and his black wideawake hat was missing!

"Horatio never went out like that without speaking to me," lamented Harriet.

The afternoon hours dragged by and when dinner time came Horatio was still absent. The long oak dining table had been reduced to the comparatively small circle of its primordial unit. The curtains had not been drawn and, through the tall windows at the end of the room, the ghost of the departed day stared solemnly at the candles that were usurping its place. But the candles only shrugged their flames superciliously—their silver candelabra had once belonged to Charles I. "Anyway," they reflected, "it's better to be a live candle than a dead sun!" A remark which, to be strictly truthful, was not original, having been handed down in the candle family for generations.

The continued absence of the beloved curate cast a damper on the spirits of the diners and made conversation a burden. Even the all important servant question was for the time being forgotten.

"I don't see why we're worrying so," said Kate, after a longer pause than usual. "He's probably lost his way in the woods and is trying to find his way home by that ridiculous compass on his watch chain; he showed it to me once." She smiled at the recollection. "It has no more sense of direction than poor, dear Mr. Merle himself has. I give you my word the wretched thing never pointed twice to the same place. The dear man likes nothing better than to get lost in the woods. He told me so himself," she added, but her voice belied the optimism of her words.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

In the silence that followed Hester Storm entered bearing a chocolate blanc-mange, a dark, marble-like edifice of mortuary design imbedded in a snowdrift of whipped cream.

"By Jove, Kate!" cried Lionel, eager to change the subject, "is that the thing you were making when you chucked me out of the kitchen this afternoon?"

Kate was assaulting the quaking monument with a desperate spoon. "It's Mr. Merle's favorite pudding," she said shortly.

Lionel subsided. What was the use? No matter what topic was started, it invariably led to Merle.

The fate of the chocolate blanc-mange hung in the balance for a brief moment. If to eat it would seem to be a slight to the curate, to leave it would be a slight to the countess. The outcome was a compromise in which the honors and the blanc-mange were evenly divided.

Hester was glad when the meal drew to a close. Waiting on the table had been a nerve racking experience for her. Only the thought that she might pick up some chance clue as to the golf bag's whereabouts had nerved her to the undertaking.

Now it was over and nothing had come of it—not a single word about golf or golf bags. All the talk had been about the old parson who was late for dinner. Probably he had fallen into another mole trap or caught his whiskers in a bramble bush!

Hester was startled from these irreverent reflections by the utterance of the very word she had been listening for. The coffee cup she was in the act of handing to the countess shook perilously on its tiny saucer.

"A golf bag is a funny thing for a secretary to be

## THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

---

---

carting about," Robert Baxter was saying, "but there it was, and the day Mother borrowed it——"

"By Jove!" interrupted Lionel, checking his half-raised arm. "That's where the old boy went!"

He drained his cup quickly and put it down. It was coming out in exasperating dribblets like a magazine story and Hester, suddenly busy at the sideboard, waited breathlessly for the next instalment.

"I heard Miss Thompson call out to him from the motor," went on Lionel, "just as they were starting this morning, that if he cared to get her golf bag he could use the clubs all he wanted."

There was another maddening pause. Hester had reached the limit of her endurance; she couldn't go on rearranging the silver on the sideboard forever. She had an insane impulse to shriek. Then, suddenly, the suspense was over. Robert supplied the missing link.

"Cousin Horatio could hardly get lost on his way to the club house," he reflected, pushing back his chair as Kate started to rise, "but I'll run round in the car and inquire if he was there this afternoon. Why don't you have a look round the lake?" he turned to Lionel.

They passed into the hall and out through the front door. It was almost dark. Through the moist, warm air came the scent of pale night flowers dimly white against the dark ivy.

"I must be off," said Bob, "or the golf club will be shut. Any one want to go along?"

"I don't think Mrs. Merle should be left alone," said Kate. "I'll try to make her eat something."

Bob started toward the garage as the other two re-entered the dark house. None of the hall lamps had been lighted. In the dining room the candles were burn-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

ing low, their impish flames casting jerky shadows on the disordered table. The empty chairs, pushed back, had the unquiet stillness of arrested movement. Kate shivered.

"Get some candles," she said. "Quick before these go out!"

On the table was the depressing litter of stained coffee cups, together with sundry plates and glasses overlooked by Hester. The countess began gathering the plates and cups together and piling them on the sideboard. Lionel watched her in silence. Now only the cloth remained.

"Take the other end," she commanded.

Lionel obeyed and together they folded it into its original creases.

"I say, Kate," he said presently. "What about servants—did you telephone?"

The countess was leaving the room to "rout out Mrs. Merle," as she expressed it. She stopped short and came back to Lionel. There was a look on her face that startled him.

"No," she said at length, "I haven't telephoned. I haven't done a thing about it, and what's more, Lionel, I don't believe I will."

"Kate! Do you mean that?"

It was her turn to be startled. She had expected consternation, at the very least disapproval. Lionel's tone was one of joyous relief.

"By Jove, Kate, if that's the way you feel, then I know I'm right. I've been turning it over in my mind ever since this morning," he went on eagerly, "and when I heard the servants had all bolted I said to myself: 'Now's the chance to show that old blighter Baxter that an English Johnny who dates back to the Conqueror—

## THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

---

---

and all that rot—is just as good, when it comes to the scratch, as a self-made American who's only just invented himself and thinks he's the only Johnny on earth that ever did an honest day's work."

As he paused for breath his face became suddenly luminous with a new idea. "I say! This must be what the old boy calls 'chucking us into a pond.'"

"Lionel! You don't mean—you can't mean that he dismissed the servants himself?"

"Who? Old Baxter? Not he! He doesn't know a thing about it, that I'll swear to, but——"

"But what?"

Lionel hesitated, then went on quickly. "I got a tip yesterday, and if it wasn't straight from the horse's mouth it was jolly well the next thing to it."

"Well?"

He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "If it hadn't been for us four relatives being here Cousin Hiram would have shut up the house when they went to Brighton."

For a moment there was dead silence. Then Lionel went on. "That means the old boy really is in a tight place, otherwise he'd never have thought of it—and, by Jove, Kate, I'd like to do something to help him if it's only picking cabbages or—blackening boots—there's something I can do." Lionel's face shone with a joyous recollection. "Once I blacked the boots of six people for two weeks."

"You did!" Kate laughed incredulously.

Lionel nodded. "A caravan party in Devonshire, two married women, one flapper just out of school, two husbands, another chap and me. The flapper was the hardest——"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"The hardest?"

"I mean her boots. I couldn't get my hand into them—had to hold 'em by the heel."

"That settles it!" decided the countess. "It's perfectly simple. We'll go on just as we are. I'm cook, you're kitchen boy and boots, and cousin Harriet can be upstairs girl." Kate laughed nervously, then, suddenly her whole manner changed. "Lionel," she said, "I want to tell you something. Ever since luncheon I have been haunted by the picture of that darling old man waiting on the table. There was something in his face that went right through me—I can't tell you what it was, but every time I looked at him I wanted to run and put my arms round his neck and have a good cry. I never felt like such a good for nothing rotter in my life. And when I looked up and found he'd gone——" She stopped speaking and got up quickly. "There! I must go to Mrs. Merle."

Lionel struck his repeater. "By Jove! It's nine o'clock! I must go to the lake."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MARTIN LUTHER

**A**LL this time Harriet remained in her room, pacing up and down the floor, pausing at every sound to listen at the window. Perched on the window-sill, Martin Luther mewed insistently, his head pressed against the leaded glass. Why did he mew like that?

Suddenly it seemed to Harriet that Martin Luther had been mewing for an infinite period of time. She opened the window, and the cat, half way through, hesitated, as if considering whether it was really advisable to go out, after all. Then, sliding softly downward to the roof of the conservatory he disappeared round the angle of the house.

Where had the cat gone? Harriet had an inherent aversion to cats, her toleration of Martin Luther being a strong testimonial to her love for Horatio, but she had moments of believing, as he did, that cats possess a fearful knowledge not shared by men. Why had Martin Luther acted so strangely? Where had he gone?

It was terribly quiet now, and, as the curate's wife turned away from the window the darkness of the room, deepened by contrast, filled her with sudden panic. She hurried from the house, and her groping flight was like the progress of a nightmare.

Out of doors the dew-cooled air pressed Harriet's



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

forehead like the hand of a nurse. The velvet blending of darkness and light, silence and sound, was infinitely soothing. To and fro she paced the darkening lawn, each time venturing a little further. Behind the lodge it was quite black under the cedars. Out in the lane the shadows were terrifying.

The hours passed.

Some one was coming. Harriet listened fearfully, leaning back against the steep bank among the pungent ferns, her heart beating painfully. As the steps came nearer and she recognized Lionel, her relief from the terror of a strange man turned to despair. Horatio was not with him.

"Lionel, is that you?"

At the sudden apparition of Harriet Lionel stopped short, and, turning at the same instant, almost lost his balance. A small, dark object fell to the ground, something he had been carrying under his arm. Harriet clutched his wrist.

"What's that?"

Without answering Lionel picked up from the ground what seemed like a piece of the darkness.

"You'd better take my arm, Mrs. Merle, the road's quite rough here." He offered his arm with an awkward movement.

"What is it? What have you got there?"

She snatched the thing from under his arm; she needed no one to tell her whose it was, this soft, black felt hat.

"Where did you get it? It's wet—it's dripping wet!" He felt her nails in his wrist.

"I—I found it—I found it——"

"Where? Where did you find it?" she shrieked.

## MARTIN LUTHER

---

---

"By the lake," faltered Lionel.

The curate's wife neither fainted nor lost her head. Her fingers relaxed and she became strangely, terribly calm.

"A lantern—quick! There's one at the lodge."

Lionel had to run to keep pace with her.

They found the little gothic house quite dark and the door locked. Their knocking brought no response. The only sign of life was Martin Luther, whose plaintive cries, louder every second, indicated that he was running to meet them.

"Try the back door," said Harriet. "We must get a lantern."

Lionel plunged through the blackness of the rhododendrons, not stopping to find the path. Harriet, leaning against the door, kept up a ceaseless pounding on the iron knocker. Martin Luther continued to mew.

Never before had the curate's wife heard a cat mew in that way—short, sharp cries, changing to long, mournful wails as he pushed against her in the dark or clawed at her dress. Then his voice died away as with an incredible rushing noise he dashed down the steps and across the gravel, only to return the next moment with the same sound of scrambling feet and flying pebbles.

At last her ear caught the swish of parted bushes and the tread of human feet, and Lionel's voice came from close by.

"It's locked."

"Try the windows."

"They're all fastened. What's that?" he cried.

"It's the cat," gasped Harriet. "He's going mad—we can't wait." Her words seemed to force their way between heartbeats.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

Lionel guided her down the scarcely visible steps, and together they started up the drive. Martin Luther trotted between, rubbing against one and the other in turn. His plaintive mew had given place to an excited, cooing tremolo. Suddenly from somewhere at the right came again the sharp, wailing cries they had heard at first.

They stood stock still, and as they harkened the same strange impulse came to them both. Without a word they turned sharply from the gravel, and, mounting the soft turf of the bank, scrambled through the laurel bushes and ran in the direction of the sound.

It was a forlorn hope, but they followed it, followed it desperately. Now the mewing sounded near, now faint and far off. At one time they lost it altogether, then, all at once, it seemed to come from somewhere below their feet.

"I say! Look out!" cried Lionel, catching Harriet's arm. "You nearly went over!"

They were standing close to the edge of a dark declivity, in reality not very steep, yet of sufficient depth to be dangerous to any one coming upon it unawares. This last remnant of the ancient moat, for such it was, lay only a few yards from the oldest wing of the house, yet so artfully was it screened on two sides by dense shrubbery and on the third by a crumbling, ivy-covered wall, once part of the old tower, that its presence was known to only two people at Ipping House—the curate and little An Petronia.

Harriet, straining her ears, became suddenly conscious that Martin Luther had stopped mewing! And, as she listened fearfully there came a faint, pulsating sound, vibrant, velvety, the most comfortable of nature's

## MARTIN LUTHER

---

voices, whose very name is the synonym for curled contentment; Martin Luther was purring!

Whereupon there crept into Harriet's heart the dawn of hope she had thought gone forever. And presently there came, seemingly from the very center of the earth, a familiar voice, faint but lifelike:

"Poor pussy! Poor old puss! Good Martin Luther!"  
"Horatio!" she screamed at the top of her voice.

Once more came the voice of Horatio, this time a little louder: "Is that you, my dear?"

"Of course it's me! How can you ask? Where are you, Horatio? What are you doing? Are you hurt? Why don't you speak?"

"I'm all right, my dear," was the faint yet cheerful response, "but I can't get out—the door's locked."

The door? What did he mean? A door out there in the open park?

Harriet was seized by a new terror. Horatio's mind was unhinged. He had always been eccentric, not a bit like other people—and now—now it had come!

In her sudden access of woe Harriet Merle did the nearest thing to fainting she knew. She sat down. That is to say, Harriet started to sit down. The invisible precipice at her feet and the law of gravitation did the rest.

As the curate's wife half slid, half rolled down the steep, grassy incline her ear, keyed to the highest pitch of dreadful expectancy, caught the sound of a scratching match. Lionel was striking a light.

"Wait, Lionel!" she screamed with all the breath she had to spare, and even as she did so her indecorous revolutions ceased gently on the level turf at the bottom of the incline.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

In an instant she was on her feet and had shaken her disordered plumage into the hen-like seemliness befitting a curate's wife.

"Now strike a match, Lionel!" she called.

Then it was that Lionel performed a deed of heroism that only an Englishman can appreciate. Unopened in his pocket, just as it had come in that morning's mail was the last number of a sporting journal known as *The Pink Un*, so called from the roseate tint of the paper, attributed by the fanciful to an inherent sense of shame in the pages themselves in no wise shared by their editors. This was the only thing in the way of paper Lionel could find in his pockets, and his match box was almost empty.

Without a moment's hesitation he unfolded the precious sheet, and, tearing page after page into remorseless strips, folded them quickly into long spills. Then striking a match, with the utmost care, he lighted the first of his paper torches.

The flame leaped up, and Harriet saw that she stood in a grassy, bath-shaped hollow, at least two heads higher than herself, but how long it was impossible to say. Lionel quickly joined her, lighting a fresh torch as he came, and giving her the remainder of the precious paper to hold in reserve.

As they moved forward cautiously the darkness in front of them resolved itself into a glistening barrier of ivy extending straight upward into the immense blackness above. This, as Harriet afterward learned, was the other side of the ivy-covered ruin whose forgotten origin had been a perpetual source of speculation to Horatio and herself ever since they came to Ippin House.

## MARTIN LUTHER

---

“Horatio!” she cried, pressing her face against the damp leaves. She heard his familiar little cough.

“My dear Harriet, there must be a heavy dew. I hope you remembered your galoshes.” His voice seemed to come from the depths of the ivy.

Reassuring as it was, the curate’s calmness, his very solicitude was indescribably irritating to the overwrought nerves of his wife.

“How can you talk like that,” she cried, “after all I’ve been through, Horatio, thinking you were drowned in the lake—and you sit there like a—like a mole and talk about galoshes!”

Suddenly her hand, pushing through a foot’s thickness of ivy, encountered cold stone. Her anger turned instantly to fear.

“Where are you, Horatio? Why don’t you come out? You must come out! Oh, I can’t bear it!” she sobbed convulsively.

“My dear Harriet,” began Horatio—but he got no further. Whatever consolation the gentle curate had to offer was cut short by a joyful shout from Lionel.

“By Jove! I’ve found the door!” His cry was accompanied by a sound of rustling leaves.

As Lionel forced his way through the ivy tangle his paper torch went out. Lighting a fresh one at the sacrifice of a precious match, he found himself in a low, chimney-like chamber about the width of his outspread arms, half buried in earth and smelling of decayed wood and fungus. The damp stone sides slanted sharply inward to where, scarcely a yard away, gray with mould and studded with rusty iron bolts, loomed the upper half of an ancient wooden door. Only one hinge, huge, rusty, and fantastically wrought, was visible

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

above the earth. Curled close against the door, blinking yellowly and purring like an automobile, sat Martin Luther.

Again the torch went out, but Lionel had seen enough. The door opened inward, that is to say, away from him, and in the grotesque scrollwork of the great hinge were three empty nail holes, leaving only two entire nails.

He leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

"Is the ground clear on your side, Mr. Merle? The beastly door opens inward, you know."

"You don't say," came from the curate. "It's pitch dark here. I have a candle, a perfectly splendid candle, but no matches."

"I have some perfectly splendid matches and no candle," laughed Lionel.

Merle joined in the laugh, and Harriet wondered, fearfully, if the two men had gone mad.

A minute later a crash of rending wood and cringing metal caused her heart to stand still. At the same instant came a triumphant shout from Lionel and a sound of Horatio's voice close by, and, before she fully realized what had happened, Harriet Merle was sobbing, laughing, and scolding in her husband's arms.

Lionel had kicked in the door.

Martin Luther led the way back, his tail at the proud perpendicular of conscious rectitude. He had done a good evening's work and that, too, under most trying conditions. Human beings, he reflected, were all very well in their way—unquestionably they had their uses, at times they were even necessary (when one falls into a canal, for instance), but their deplorable ignorance of mewing, beyond such elementary phrases as "Please give

## MARTIN LUTHER

---

---

me milk," or "Oblige me by opening this door,"  
cessively annoying.

iel had raced ahead to carry the joyful news to  
untess. Tucked safely away in his pocket was  
nant, snatched from the burning of the sinful pink  
aper, not, it is to be feared, the portion least de-  
g of fiery punishment.

Now Horatio, arriving at the bank which Harriet  
scended with such unpremeditated energy a short  
efore, placed the candle upon the ground to assist  
fe up the steep incline. Here his eye fell upon  
long piece of paper lying on the grass close to  
ndle-stick and glistening in the yellow light. As  
ked it up the word "Reginal" caught his eye. It  
page of An Petronia's novel, the "Misforchins of  
il." The curate put the paper in his pocket to  
to the little girl, and, in another minute, he had  
ten all about it.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE MISSING PAGE

**R**OBERT BAXTER was the first to hear the good news, and, being a young man of few words, he lighted a candle and made straight for the wine cellar. In a few moments he returned empty handed.

"It's mighty funny," he said to Lionel. "There was a whole case last week—all but one quart, and it's disappeared, case and all! And what's more, that '66 brandy is gone, too. I'm certain there were at least half a dozen left. What do you make of it?"

Lionel tugged at his mustache.

"Well, if you ask me, old chap, I don't mind telling you I never did like the cut of Parker's sidewhiskers."

"Parker!" exclaimed Bob. "It doesn't seem possible. You never saw such references as he brought. There were two bishops and a prime minister. It's queer, though," he added, as he relocked the cellar door.

At the supper table, much to the Storm girl's relief, her services were not required. There were no more secrets to be learned and to-morrow she would offer to call at the club for the golf bag. No, that would look suspicious—well, she would think out a plan, she would manage it some way.

In a great chair at Horatio's side sat little An Petronia, who, at the curate's request, had been allowed to join

## THE MISSING PAGE

---

---

the happy gathering. Clapsed in her hand was a priceless nectarine (too marvelous for human food) and her watchful eyes were fixed on the door fearful each moment of the apparition of a beckoning grandmother and the End of Things.

And now every one was eager to hear the curate's story, all but Martin Luther, who showed not the slightest interest. It was enough for him that his dear friend was safe and sound. What more could anybody want? In recognition of his conspicuous services, Martin Luther had been awarded a special fish, which now existed only in a beautiful dream as Martin lay fast asleep in the lap of An Petronia.

The curate's story did not take long to tell. When he walked out of the dining room this morning to vanish so strangely, his only thought was to get out of doors and, snatching his hat from the antlers in the hall, he passed quickly through the open front door. Then, remembering that Martin Luther had not had any luncheon, he changed his mind and went straight to the kitchen, entering by the outside door instead of returning to the house, which accounted for Lionel's not seeing him.

As Horatio was about to enter the kitchen, he was startled by the sound of steps. He stood still with his hand on the knob and listened. Who could be in the kitchen? Every one was upstairs in the dining room, every one who had any right in the house.

He opened the door quietly. No one was there. Again he listened. There was somebody in the passage, the dark stone passage that led to the wine cellar and to the well room further on. Horatio tiptoed across the kitchen and peered through the archway. There was

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

a faint yellow flicker in the gloom at the turn of the passage. The curate wondered what anybody could be doing in the well room. The servants never went near it. For one thing it had no window and there was something frightening about the black oblong of the well in the middle of the stone floor. It reminded Horatio of a picture by Doré in Dante's "Inferno," and, according to Parker (who claimed to have read it in a book) it was in that very well that the pious Lady Ysobel had been drowned. Once he had seen the Gray Lady sitting on the edge of the well wringing her hands and "weeping and wailing most orful." It had given him the "willys" for a week.

Keeping close to the wall, the curate crept cautiously along the passage. The well room door was almost closed. Fearful lest it should creak, he opened it slowly toward him, inch by inch. At this point in the story the curate paused to relieve his throat with a glass of water.

"Weren't you frightened, Daddy Merle?" squeaked An Petronia, thrilling with delicious terror.

"Yes, my dear," said Horatio. "When I opened that door and saw where that light came from I am compelled to admit that I was frightened."

Again the curate paused, this time to wipe his lips with the napkin. Martin Luther opened his eyes and yawned, stretching his fore paws straight out in front of him, the very image of a sleepy sphinx. "Isn't that story finished yet?" he mewed, then raising himself slowly to his feet he stepped over the arm of An Petronia's chair and curled up to sleep in the curate's lap.

"Well, my dear?" queried Harriet impatiently.

## THE MISSING PAGE

---

---

"I say!" cried Lionel, "what about the light?"

"The light came from the well," replied the curate.

Then he related how, as he stared at the well, half expecting to see the Gray Lady rise slowly out of its depths, there appeared, instead, a human hand holding—"What do you think it was holding?" he asked looking at each in turn.

"A dagger, of course," laughed Kate.

"A golden key," came timidly from An Petronia.

"If it wasn't an umbrella, I give it up," said Lionel.

"Go on! Tell us!" urged Harriet.

Robert Baxter had just achieved a perfect smoke ring. He watched it soar upward and melt away, then questioned quietly. "A bottle of champagne?"

"My dear Mr. Baxter, that's exactly what it was," said the curate.

Lionel slapped his knee vigorously. "Parker! By Jove! Five to one it was Parker!"

The curate's eyes blinked with amazement. "Bless my soul! How did you know that?"

"Oh, I just put two and two together," drawled Lionel, "and it made Parker."

"Fortunately Parker didn't see me," continued Horatio, "and as he reached down for another bottle I slipped back into the passage and behind the door. It was a dreadful moment. You may not believe it, I suppose I was a little unstrung, but I had an uncontrollable desire to laugh. I pressed my hands over my mouth, but I fear that only made it worse—it was like new wine in an old bottle—I simply exploded."

"Horatio! You didn't laugh?" exclaimed Harriet.

"My dear Harriet, it burst through my fingers. You have often complained of my laugh, Harriet, but this

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

was much worse. It must have sounded like that strange cry of the American natives."

Bob looked up, puzzled. "American natives?"

"I take it so," replied Horatio. "I heard it once at Earl's Court at the Wild West Show. It is apparently produced by a rapid oscillation of the palm of the hand against the mouth while enunciating with great force the sound of the fifth vowel."

Bob laughed uproariously. "Oh, yes, of course! That's the sound the squaws make when they go shopping on Broadway."

"Dear me," exclaimed the curate, "what an interesting custom! Harriet, love," he turned to his wife, "remind me to make a note of what Mr. Baxter has just told us about the squaws going shopping on Broadway."

Bob's laugh took on a doubtful ring—he was never quite sure with Horatio whether the joke was on himself or on the curate.

"Whatever it sounded like," continued Merle, "the effect was most astonishing. I could see through the hinge-crack. Parker shot out of that well like a Jack-in-the-box and flew up the steps and along the passage as if Beelzebub himself were after him. I don't suppose he stopped this side of Ippingford."

"Except to pick up your hat," put in Lionel.

"Dear me! Perhaps he did, I left it on the kitchen dresser. Well I hope it will be a lesson to the man."

And now why on earth did he go back to that wretched cellar? Parker's candle would have burned itself out in the well and the wine was safe for the time being anyway. It seemed to Horatio, as if some irresistible force had dragged him down those steps against his will, right to the brink of the well. There at the bottom

## THE MISSING PAGE

---

was the candle burning cheerfully among the bottles, at least a dozen of champagne and various others. The curate had no trouble in letting himself down and was already pondering on the best way to climb out again without soiling his clothes, when his attention was caught by a peculiarity in the construction of the well. Two sides and one end were built of small stones about six or eight inches square. The remaining end was quite different; there were small stones at the top and bottom and, in the middle, one large stone about three feet square.

Horatio picked up the candle and carefully examined this stone. In the lower right hand corner was a half obliterated Latin inscription:

N	H L	T	NGE
O	NIA	D	SCE
A	O		1360

He spelled it out slowly. The first word, allowing for the space, could only be Nihil. The missing "A" of Tange was also quite evident, so was the "M" of Omnia. He puzzled over the last word for some time till the light of the candle, held a little to one side and very close to the stone, showed that what he had taken for the letter "I" was really the letter "D". Then it was easy, and now Horatio had the motto complete: NIHIL TANGE OMNIA DISCE it now read: "Touch nothing, know everything."

When a thing sounds so utterly senseless as that, he reflected, it generally turns out to mean something very wise, especially if it is chiseled in stone.

He held the candle close to the date: Anno 1360. Here was something peculiar. The last figure, the zero,

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

was cut very deep into the stone—much deeper than any other figure or letter in the whole inscription. The difference was too marked to be accidental. That figure “nought,” he reasoned, must have some relation to the inscription. But what? What was there in the inscription about a zero? Then in a flash it came to him.

Touch nothing—Learn everything. Now it was plain. That figure “nought” was the key to the mystery. It must be touched, pressed with the finger. The candlestick shook in his hand, he set it down on the floor beside him. Then Horatio pressed one finger firmly on the center of the figure “nought” in the corner of the big stone.

Nothing happened.

He pressed harder, still harder, still with no effect. Then, as he relaxed the pressure, there came a sharp metallic twang from some hidden place, and, with a strangely animate whine, the stone swung slowly away from him revealing a dark aperture.

Carefully guarding the flame of the candle, the curate stepped through the opening and found himself at the top of a short flight of stone steps. Before going any further, he placed one of the champagne bottles on the top step in such a way that its neck prevented the door from closing.

At the foot of the steps Horatio found himself in a passage which, from its position, he judged must lead toward the ivy covered ruin that formed the outer end of the kitchen garden.

In another moment he knew he was right. Directly overhead, at the further end of the gallery, was an irregular fissure scarcely a foot in width. The crack continued upward for a little way, and through the open-

## THE MISSING PAGE

---

---

ing Horatio could see far above him a mountain of jagged stones over which poured a torrent of ivy. Beyond this was a triangle of blue across which flashed the blackness of a bird's wing.

As the curate was about to return, a sudden draught extinguished his candle. Moving cautiously, he probed the treacherous blackness, with outstretched hands, trusting to his sense of direction. Suddenly he stumbled against the steps and plunged heavily forward with his whole weight upon the partly open stone door.

Through the crunch and gurgle of the decapitated champagne bottle and the thud of the door, Merle heard the sharp metallic twang of a hidden lock.

"Go on," said the curate's wife.

"My dear Harriet, I worked over that door in the pitch darkness for two blessed hours."

"I thought you had a candle, Daddy Merle," piped An Petronia sleepily.

"I had, my dear, but no matches, not a single match!"

He pushed back his chair.

"I say! Let's all go and kick the life out of that beastly door!" cried Lionel.

The curate smiled. "I believe I shall sleep better when I know how it works."

"I should think you'd excommunicate it," said Kate.

Whereupon Martin Luther jumped to the floor and walked stiffly out of the room. It was exactly as if he said: "I consider that remark in very bad taste," and everybody laughed. Harriet, however, refused to countenance such folly as going into the cellar at that time of the night, and as for An Petronia, the child ought to have been in bed hours ago!

Ten minutes later when the Reverend Horatio Merle



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

was removing various articles from his coat pockets, preparatory to folding the garment for the night, he came across the forgotten page of An Petronia's novel. As he glanced at it he was astonished to find, instead of the large childish writing he had seen there, the small neat hand of a grown person. It was a piece of a torn letter, and An Petronia had made use of the blank side. Nothing very surprising in that.

He laid it down on the dressing table so that he would remember to give it to the little girl in the morning. As he did so, Horatio's eye caught a startling sentence written across the upper corner of the page.

"Remember, please, not to address me as Jenny Regan, but as Hester Storm."

"Jenny Regan! Hester Storm!" he reflected. "Strange! What can that girl be doing with two names?"

Then Horatio blew out the candle.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE REVEREND HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE

**T**HE first thing in the curate's thoughts the next morning was this perplexing fragment of a letter. He examined it carefully, reading, first, the words in An Petronia's childish scrawl written on what had been the blank side of a castaway sheet:

chapter nine

reginals mother died six months before he was born and ever since Mr peabody had injoyed very dilicat health.

Horatio smiled at this tragically complicated picture of Reginald's entrance upon the scene of life. Then he turned the sheet and studied what was left of the original letter, a letter evidently written by his protégée, Hester Storm. Lengthwise and crosswise of this sheet ran sharp creases where the letter had been folded, and on either side the edges were torn symmetrically, leaving half-finished words and sentences. About half the letter was missing.

The letter began, "Dearest sist—" and five lines farther down the curate came upon "darling Rosalie." Then, after broken lines in which he made out "pull off something," there were six complete lines on what had been the last pages, that read:

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

“ . . . so wonderful in the next few days that I can keep straight always after this the way you want me to, darling, and you and I can go out west where the air is fine or into the Adirondacks or anywhere you like, dearest sister, and you'll never have to work any . . . ” Then there was a blot and a tear.

Most important of all was a postscript in the upper corner that read, “Remember, please, to address me as Hester Storm, not as Jenny Regan.”

Horatio read and reread this with absorbed interest. He turned it this way and that, squinted at it, sniffed at it, rubbed his glasses, and tugged at his thin side whiskers, the total result being that his excitement and astonishment were presently at fever heat as he realized that he was on the verge of a momentous discovery. Ordinarily his conscience would have pricked the gentle curate at reading a letter not meant for his eyes, but this was an exceptional case, a matter to be immediately investigated for the common good. It was a critical moment. He was on the track of something serious, possibly a crime, and his mind buzzed with the possibilities held by this scrap of paper. What would a great detective do with such a clue? What would Horatio Merle do with it?

Tingling with a growing sense of his importance, the little man studied the paper again with a penetrating frown. An extraordinary document! A fascinating puzzle! To “pull off something” was, he knew, a locution familiar in the United States, and meaning to “make a coup” or to carry through a purpose; this he had gathered from his reading of adventure stories in the cheap magazines. So something was to be “pulled off!” Something involving “thousands of dollars!” Something that

## HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE

---

had delayed a sailing to America and brought to Ippingford this unfortunate girl, Jenny Regan, alias Hester Storm, on some desperate errand involving a rich reward. There was her plain statement, "You'll never have to work again!" How simple she must have thought him that day at the golf course! A gullible fool, believing every word she told him! It was pitiful!

And straightway Horatio resolved that in the present emergency, he would act a sterner part; he would be hard as adamant and would push this investigation through to a relentless finish. That was clearly his duty in view of the peril to which he had exposed the dwellers at Ipping House. This girl must be baffled in her wicked purpose, and, having sinned, she must now suffer.

But there was need of caution; he must have his facts well in hand before making any accusation or showing any suspicion; in short, he must dissemble—detectives invariably did dissemble, and already Horatio felt himself a detective. He had the analytical mind and intuitive insight, he knew it, always had known it, and, although these qualities had hitherto lain dormant, he would use them now, and by one supreme effort, he would not only make amends for past remissness and render a signal service to the Baxter household, but he would give himself the exhilarating joy of running down a real criminal.

His first step was evidently to learn from An Petronia where and when she had found this important fragment, so he went straight to the lodge and inquired for his little friend. Mrs. Pottle informed him, with a shrug of displeasure, that the child was playing somewhere about the grounds, and, after a careful search, the curate found her in the sunken gardens giving a spelling lesson

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

to a forlorn wooden dolly sprawling on a marble bench.

An Petronia was delighted to recover the missing page from her novel. Her memory about it was perfectly distinct. She had picked it out of the fireplace in the new lady's room at the lodge. The new lady being Hester Storm? Yes, Hester Storm. Was An Petronia accustomed to use scraps of paper out of fireplaces for her novel? Well, yes; because she had no other paper. Besides, this was such a pretty shade. Didn't Daddy Merle think so? Daddy Merle shrewdly agreed that it was a pretty shade, a beautiful shade. Did An Petronia think the new lady had any more paper like this? Oh, yes, a whole box full. Indeed! Was Hester at the lodge now? No, she was at the big house sewing. Oh! Well, would An Petronia mind, for a very particular reason, a secret—going to Hester's room and getting a sheet of this pretty paper, just one sheet?

At this suggestion the child opened her blue eyes and her sweet, red lips in wide astonishment, but being assured by Daddy Merle (who must know) that it was all right, she danced happily away, while the curate followed on, not quite reconciled to this necessity of setting his eager little friend to pilfering. Still he saw the value as evidence of a sheet of paper from the sewing girl's room, and when the youthful novelist presently returned with the desired article (the paper was obviously identical), the good man merely patted the golden red curls with a solemn warning that not a word of their secret be breathed to the new lady. And he borrowed overnight the incriminating page from An Petronia's romance.

The next thing was to have a talk with Hester Storm herself, and here Horatio saw the importance of clever

## HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE

---

---

management. An experienced detective would draw from the girl, without arousing her suspicion, as much damaging testimony as possible, and then, having involved her in a network of lies, he would turn suddenly and overwhelm her with the evidence of her own written words. That would be the method, the curate felt sure, of *M. Lecoq* or *Mr. Sherlock Holmes*, and, with a sigh of regret, he resigned himself to the painful necessity of following their example. He disliked exceedingly resorting to subterfuge and—er—dissimulation; but there was no choice, the thing must be done and—very well, he would do it. He would be firm, he would be relentless, he would immediately find out what it was that his unworthy protégée was trying to “pull off.”

Merle's first move was to exercise his patience for an hour and a half, strolling about among the shrubs and beeches, watching for the appearance of Hester Storm. He knew the girl would come forth presently from the manor, after her task, and he planned to intercept her on her way to the lodge. A detective must always be ready to wait, so Horatio waited.

The chiming clock in the stable tower, with pompous deliberation, had just sounded the third quarter after four o'clock when the curate espied a familiar scarlet cloak coming down the graveled walk.

“Enfin!” he breathed in relief, and a moment later he was walking at Hester's side, marveling at the innocence and candor of her beautiful dark eyes.

“My dear child,” he began kindly, “I have something important to say to you. Would you mind strolling over toward the lake? I know a quiet seat where we may talk—shall I say without interruption?”

The girl looked at him in surprise.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"I will do whatever you wish, sir," she said simply. "You have been so good to me! I hope I have done nothing to displease you."

"Of course not, my child, that is to say, why—er—of course not," he replied, remembering with difficulty that it was his duty to dissemble.

They came presently to Horatio's favorite retreat by the lake, a low, broad bench between two friendly fir trees, and here, looking out over the placid surface, with its heavy shade lines following the shores, they had a memorable interview. It was characteristic of Merle that he chose this spot of soothing beauty, where nature seemed to reveal her tenderest moods, for the hard business of criminal investigation.

"The point is, Hester," he began, "I have been thinking over the matter of your arrival at Ipping House and your establishment here, and, while I have the deepest sympathy for you, my friend, I feel that I should have shown a greater interest in your family and—er—antecedents; in short, I should have asked you to tell me a little more about yourself."

"I'll be glad to tell you anything you want to know," the girl said with an air of perfect truthfulness, while the curate continued to marvel.

"How did you happen to come to so small and unimportant a place as Ippingford? As I understand it, you knew no one here and—er—why did you buy a ticket to Ippingford?"

"I didn't," answered Hester with ready invention. "I bought a ticket to York and I—I got off here because," she hesitated, and her eyes, wandering over the lake, rested on a company of swans that were drifting down

## HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE

---

---

the cove in stately squadron. In an instant she had her explanation.

"Yes?" said Merle encouragingly.

"I got off here because it was so beautiful. I wanted to be in the country—away from noise and smoke and—you see I've always lived in cities, and I've been unhappy there; I've had no luck there, and when I saw this lake and the hills and green things it seemed like a voice calling me, and I—I just got off the train. I couldn't help it."

There was a quiver in her voice that stirred Horatio's sympathy, but he hardened his heart.

"Then you had no specific purpose in coming to Ippingford?"

"Oh, no! I did not even know the name of the town."

"And suppose you had found no friends here, no employment? What would you have done?"

"I should have gone on to some other place. And I should never have forgotten the flowers and hedges and that lovely walk I took the day I met you—when you were so kind to me."

Her sweet, low tones moved him strangely, but he kept to his task.

"That was only natural, my dear, after you had come to my assistance. But tell me, are you contented here? Do you plan to stay with us, now that we have made a place for you?"

Hester looked at him sharply. How came he to put that question? What was he driving at?

"Why, yes," she assured him. "I want to stay, if you are satisfied with me."



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"You have no intention of going away? No thought of returning to America?"

"No," she said, disturbed by his persistence. "Why do you ask me that?"

"I thought perhaps your family in America—or your friends——"

She shook her head sadly. "I have no family. No friends. I am all alone."

"You have no father or mother? No brother? No sister?"

Again she shook her head. There was no particular reason why she should lie about Rosalie, except that her sister was too sacred a thing in Hester's life to be mentioned lightly. And she failed to see what difference it could possibly make to this queer little man whether she said that she had a sister or had no sister.

But it made a great difference to Horatio, for Hester's denial of Rosalie came as a crushing culmination to her other falsehoods. She had lied in declaring that she had no special purpose in visiting Ippingford. She had lied in saying she was not planning a return to America. And now she had lied about her sister. The moment had come for Merle to strike. His trap was ready, his victim helpless and defenseless; he had only to touch the spring, or, more precisely, to produce the accusing letter.

Horatio sat silent, looking out over the lake now bathed in its full summer splendor. What a glory of color! What a profusion of life and joy of life! The birds, the insects, the myriad creatures of field and wood and lake, all happy in their several ways! There were the thrushes calling!

Horatio sighed. Why should not men and women be as carefree as these songsters of the air? Why

## HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE

---

---

all this sadness in a world that God had made so beautiful? Why all this sorrow and sin?

Horatio turned to the girl beside him, and there was a wonderful light in his eyes, the light of humility and spiritual love. She lifted her eyes to his, then dropped them, then lifted them again, then dropped them again. A strange thing had happened. The curate's heart was so filled with the spirit of kindness and pity that there was no resisting it, either by him or by her. His well planned attack and her watchful defense were alike un-availing against the spirit of kindness and pity!

Tears came suddenly into Horatio's eyes, and when he tried to speak there was a catch in his voice. He looked at this young woman. God's fair creature, and it seemed as if he read into her soul and understood. Then he reached out impulsively and took her two hands in his.

"My poor child! My poor child!" he murmured.

The gentle curate was far off the track of approved detective procedure. He was neither master of himself nor of the situation. His analytical mind had failed him, his intuitive insight also, leaving only the treasure of his heart as an available asset. Quite forgotten was his carefully set trap! And the girl's letter! And her lies! Just one fact remained, that here was a soul in distress, a sister pilgrim on life's hard highway who needed succor.

"You have suffered! You have suffered! I—I am sorry!" he added.

In Hester's whole life this was a unique moment. For years she had broken the law and had grown skilful in defending herself, after the fashion of law breakers. Had Merle sprung his trap it is doubtful if he would have caught her. Had he challenged her with the letter

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

it is more than likely she would have found some way of explaining it. Had he pointed out her lies she would have saved herself by other lies. That was the sort of thing she knew how to do, but she had never learned to defend herself against love; she didn't know the answering move to pity—and when he looked at her like that—as Rosalie had looked—and told her he was sorry, why—it got right through her guard, it was more than she could bear, and, before either of them knew it, that world-old miracle, the power of simple goodness, had been shown again, and one more starved soul had heard and answered the silent voice.

Hester's bosom began to heave, her breath came in quick, sharp gulps, she clenched her hands and tried to fight this thing that was happening, but it was too strong for her.

"Wh—what is it?" she gasped, her eyes on him in desperate pleading.

"It is God calling you, my child. It is God calling," the curate whispered.

Then the storm broke in convulsive, hysterical weeping. And Horatio waited, without speaking, without trying to stem the flood.

"I—I've told you what isn't true," she confessed in broken tones. "I have no right to be here. I—I'm no good," and the storm broke again.

"Listen to me, my dear," said Merle soothingly. "We are all of us weak and sinful. I'm sure I don't know why, but it seems to be our fate to——"

"Wait!" sobbed the girl. "You don't know—what I am. You don't know—what I have done."

"I know you are sorry," he answered gently.

"Sorry," she repeated. "Oh, yes, I'm sorry, but that

## HORATIO TURNS DETECTIVE

---

---

isn't enough. I'm going to tell you everything, and——"

"Stop! I don't want to know what you have done. I can help you better if I only know that you are sorry. Whatever your sins, they will be forgiven—if you ask God for forgiveness. You understand, my child?"

"I—I understand."

"If you see any way to make amends for any wrong act you must take that way."

The girl's head was bowed as if in prayer. "I will," she said.

"And in the future you must try—with all your heart and soul—— Say those words, my child."

He laid his hand tenderly on her glossy black hair.

"I will try in the future—with all my heart and soul," she murmured.

"To be honest, to be kind," he continued.

"To be honest, to be kind," she repeated.

"I will ask God every day to give me strength against temptation."

"I will ask God every day—to give me strength against temptation."

"For Jesus' sake. Amen."

"For Jesus' sake. Amen."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE QUARREL

**I**N LESS than forty-eight hours after her arrival in Brighton, Mrs. Baxter had completely recovered from the shock of her midnight encounter with the Gray Lady. On the afternoon of the second day she sat in the window of her fifth floor suite at the Metropole watching the fluttering, swaying, glittering procession on the promenade below, a frolic of glad colors that might have sworn at each other in a ballroom the night before now mingling happily together in the golden urbanity of the sunshine. Some such thought must have formed itself in Eleanor's mind as she suddenly exclaimed. "You can really wear any color on a day like this!"

Mrs. Baxter called to the maid who was moving about in an adjoining bedroom, "Oh, Gibson, did I bring my sapphire voile with the duchesse lace? Thank you—I was afraid it had been left."

"And the cerise foulard?—Oh—good!"

On the lower promenade the people looked like colored beads, and still further away, on the dazzling white of the sands, they were minute dark specks. Low against the blue wall of sky hung the ocean like an indigo blackboard on which figures in white chalk wrote and rewrote and rubbed themselves out with magical monotony.

The wind blowing whither it listed raised an edge of

## THE QUARREL

---

the muslin curtain and drew it softly across Eleanor's cheek and in the ocean of femininity below her window a bright colored wave swelled and tossed and broke in lawny froth.

"What a windy place!" Eleanor drew a deep breath and inwardly exulted as she recalled the lavender scented contents of the largest and lightest of her trunks.

Meanwhile Betty was taking a lonely walk on the gayly crowded upper promenade. Her sense of desolation was intensified by the hubbub of voices about her, the laughter, the shrieks of distant bathers, the throb of a far off brass band, the cry of a man selling shrimps somewhere below.

It would have been hard to devise a program less pleasing to Mr. Baxter's secretary, than this trip to Brighton. Ipping House was, at this moment, the one and only place on earth where she wished to be. At Ipping House she could, at least, have kept an eye on Kate Clendennin. There was no mistaking the countess' designs on Bob. Betty's hatred of the countess was temperamental, the hatred of the tendril haired blonde for the straight haired blonde.

Elizabeth Thompson clenched her fingers as she thought of her old playmate helpless in the toils of that unscrupulous woman. There was no question in Betty's mind about Kate's power of attraction, yet at this moment the only thing she envied the countess was her unique gift for what is sometimes called "language." She was sorely tempted to borrow a few tonic words from Kate Clendennin's vocabulary.

There was a surprise in store for Betty on her return to the hotel.

"Read that," said Eleanor, full of elation, handing

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

her an open telegram. "Read it aloud," she added laughing, "I can't hear it too often."

It was from Bob in London to say that his father was letting him off for two or three days and he would be with them in time for seven o'clock dinner.

Betty read it aloud, conscious, through her lowered eyelids, of Eleanor Baxter's searching gaze. If Mrs. Baxter expected any revelation from Betty, she was disappointed.

"I'm so glad, Mrs. Baxter; that's just the one thing you need," the girl said calmly and went on with exasperating inconsequence. "It must be nearly five. Do you want tea?"

"No, I don't want tea, I want Bob," pouted Eleanor with an imitation of baby petulance.

"I want Bob," echoed a still small voice from the inmost heart of Betty, but her face betrayed nothing.

"My dear child," said Eleanor after watching her in silence for a while, "I wish you would drop that nonsense about being a secretary. The only way I can keep from letting it out to Bob is by not speaking your name at all. If I did I should be certain to call you Betty and that would be the end of it."

Miss Thompson was sorely tempted, her resolution was breaking down, but pride came to her rescue.

"Please, please don't," she entreated so earnestly that once again Mrs. Baxter yielded.

Bob arrived early enough for a good half hour alone with his mother before dressing. Betty in her own room was taking an unprecedented time in the choice of a dinner toilet.

"You oughtn't to look too fine for a secretary," she reflected to herself in the glass, and her self in the glass

## THE QUARREL

---

reflected back rebelliously as if to say, "Oh, oughtn't I? Well, just to show you, I'll put on my frosted rose satin with the silver fringe." And she did.

Bob had less difficulty than he expected in withholding from his mother, as he had promised, the unusual state of affairs at Ipping House. Beyond a few perfunctory inquiries as to the welfare of the relatives, Eleanor asked no embarrassing questions. The mere mention of anything associated with her nocturnal adventure was distressing to her, and she felt grateful to her son for not pursuing the subject. There were plenty of other things to talk about; then, too, there was dinner to be ordered. Hitherto the meals had been sent up and the selection of dishes had been left to Betty, but this evening they were dining to music in the palmy splendor of the public dining room and the choice of a menu was reserved for the superior masculine intelligence of Robert Baxter.

Meanwhile in her own room in another part of the hotel Betty was standing with her back to the mirror. Something had happened. A coolness had sprung up between Elizabeth Thompson and her reflection; they were no longer on speaking terms. At the very last minute Betty, with sudden determination, had taken off the Parisian masterpiece which now hung across a chair, a toy Niagara of shimmering rose and silver spray, while the bewildered chambermaid hurriedly hooked her into the plainest gown she possessed, a simple black chiffon dinner frock.

"Quite good enough for a secretary," Betty remarked, as she turned her back on the mirror. There was no mistake about it, Miss Thompson and her reflection were not on speaking terms.

"I wonder what's keeping Betty," said Mrs. Baxter to



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

her son, as they waited for the lift in the crimson carpeted hall.

She was conscious of her slip the moment she had spoken. Bob was watching the slow-moving machinery of the lift. A moment before he had quoted a remark of his father's about English elevators.

"It looks to me like you fellers use molasses instead of water to work your darned elevators," Hiram had said, and the Britisher's patronizing, "Oh, I say, that would be too expensive," had made Eleanor laugh.

Now at the mention of Betty's name Bob turned sharply.

"Betty?" he echoed. "You don't mean to say Betty's here! When did she come? Why didn't you tell me before?" He looked at his mother in amazement. "Why, what's the matter, Mother?"

Eleanor was trying desperately to cover her confusion.

"Did I say Betty? How funny! I mean Miss Thompson—Mr. Baxter's secretary—she's dressing for dinner. I wonder why she doesn't come," Eleanor coughed nervously.

Bob continued to watch her, his surprise gradually giving place to a strange suspicion. It was as if a mental picture puzzle were fitting itself together in his brain. Only one piece was lacking to make it complete.

"What is Miss Thompson's Christian name, Mother?" he asked very quietly.

"Miss Thompson's first name?—her Christian name?—let me see—why, it's—it's——" Eleanor tried heroically to fib, but it was no use. Do what she would there was only one name in the whole world she could think of. She fluttered like a caught bird, then gave it up. "It's Betty, Bob."

## THE QUARREL

---

In a flash Bob's puzzle picture was complete. "Betty Thompson! Well, I have been a fool!"

His words, addressed to the ceiling, were received with a solemn plaster imitation of Olympian indifference.

Not so Eleanor. "There! I've broken my promise!" she cried excitedly. "I knew I would!"

At the same instant she became aware that Betty was hurrying along the passage toward them. She lowered her voice and spoke rapidly, "You mustn't tell her you know it! Betty would never forgive me. Promise me you won't tell—promise, Bob!"

Bob promised with his eyes—it was too late to speak.

Never had Miss Elizabeth Thompson looked less like the ugly duckling of her freckled childhood. The renunciation of her Paris finery was more than compensated for by the sparkle of her eyes and the flush of self-victory in her cheeks. At the last minute, partly as a concession to her vanquished self, partly as a precaution against draughts, she had thrown round her shoulders a web of transparent net, sparkling with embroidered flowers, effecting in her plain black frock a transformation that would have done credit to Cinderella's fairy godmother herself.

Breathless and apologetic Betty joined the others just as the elevator doors opened and Bob's dignified greeting and his mother's make-believe chidings were quickly submerged in the mysterious hush that descends upon even the most loquacious people on entering an elevator.

A table had been reserved not too near the orchestra, and its highly decorated appearance, due to an over-liberal interpretation on the manager's part, of Bob's order for a centerpiece of roses and two bunches of gardenias, had created a speculative interest in the little

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

party in advance of its arrival. In the language of the theater, it had "prepared an entrance."

As the three took their places (amid critical feminine and enthusiastic masculine stares at Betty, and critical masculine and enthusiastic feminine stares at Bob), Mrs. Baxter, who had, perhaps, the least to do with the attention they attracted, was the only one of the three who really enjoyed it. Betty felt a flush of annoyance, not so much at the attention itself—Paris had accustomed her to being stared at—but it was one thing to attract attention and quite another to bid for it, and that monstrous floral centerpiece, those unnecessarily large corsage bouquets, fairly clamored for notice. Her quick ear caught the words "Awful Americans"—"Nouveau Riche," in a high pitched feminine hiss close behind her, and at another table a monocled lout in faultless evening dress was saying in a bulky whisper, "Musical comedy, I fancy." Betty would like to have asked him to which branch of the peerage he referred, the Gaiety or the Alhambra. Anyway, she was thankful she had saved herself from the pink and silver Niagara.

As for Robert Baxter, concentrate as he would on the amiable duties of host, he could not forget his hurt—perhaps only a scratch to his vanity, perhaps something deeper. Whenever during that uncomfortable dinner he looked at the lovely girl sitting opposite and thought of the trick she had played him, he felt the hurt afresh. He recalled the first and only long talk he had had with "the secretary" at Ipping House. What fun she must have had with him!—and that letter—that fatuous letter! His face burned as he thought of it. But now the tables were turned. He had found out her secret and she did not know he knew. Now was his chance to pay her

## THE QUARREL

---

---

ck. Bob smiled in spite of himself. It was so like  
e of their childhood fights, when Betty had a tremen-  
ous secret she wouldn't tell Bob, and Bob invented a  
ore tremendous secret he wouldn't tell Betty. For a  
hole afternoon, perhaps, they would not be on speak-  
g terms. Then there would come a crisis, followed  
an explosion, and they would say terribly personal  
ings to each other. Then all at once Betty's eyes would  
l with tears and Bob would be seized with a strange  
nsation, as if he had suddenly become an entirely dif-  
ferent boy and that other boy would put his arms around  
tle Betty, and then, and then—yes, they would kiss  
d make friends.

Robert Baxter looked across the table. Betty looked  
at the same instant, and for the fraction of a second  
eir eyes became entangled, and for just that wonderful  
action of a second Robert Baxter felt the strange sen-  
tion of being the other boy. Only for an instant.

"No," he said to himself. "She's made a fool of me  
d she's got to be sorry for it. Now I have her just  
ere she had me, and I'll make her sorry—very, very  
rry."

Mrs. Baxter was pushing back her chair; she would  
ve her coffee and her cigarette upstairs. Eleanor had  
ver got used to the English lady's custom of smoking  
public. If Bob would take her to the elevator he might  
turn and have his cigar in comfort at the table. Per-  
ps Miss Thompson would show him the promenade.

Betty got up quickly.

"No, no, Miss Thompson, I sha'n't need you. I really  
a'n't," Eleanor insisted. "I have my book, and I shall  
asleep before I've read a page."

Her son accompanied her to the lift. At the door he

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

kissed her. "This isn't good night, little mother," he said affectionately. "I shall be up in a few minutes."

He watched the slow-rising lift disappear past the top of the door and returned through the almost deserted dining-room to the table where Betty was waiting for him. She was pouring black coffee into two small Sevres cups from a miniature silver coffee urn.

Bob settled himself in his chair and lighted a cigar. The dinner had been a wretched failure, and he felt quite in the mood to give Miss Elizabeth Thompson her lesson.

"Two lumps, please," he said, as Betty prepared to hand him his cup.

The secretary smiled. "That's just what I gave you, Mr. Baxter."

"You have a telepathic mind, Miss Thompson."

Something in his tone caused her to look up quickly.

"Have I? How?"

"How else could you know that I took two lumps?"

"You seem to forget," she replied, "that I have enjoyed the privilege of observing some of your habits at Ipping House. Perhaps you don't remember," she added maliciously; "you were very much occupied."

"That's unkind, Miss Thompson," answered Bob. "I recall you quite distinctly. You wrote a letter for me in the morning after I met you."

"Do you mean the letter to the brunette you met on the boat?" said Betty quietly.

"Girl I met on the boat?" he frowned, as if consulting a mental passenger list. "Oh, no, it was to a girl I once saw off on a steamer—quite a little girl—that is to say, she was a little girl then. It was a long time

## THE QUARREL

---

---

ago. She must be—well, she must be getting along.”

“An old maid?”

He pursed his lips and nodded.

“I thought you said she had a voice—was going to be a singer or something of that sort?”

“She thinks she has a voice,” he corrected. “Perhaps she had one once. It’s astonishing, though, how long a voice will last, Miss Thompson. They say Patti sang when she was over seventy.”

Betty suddenly became intensely preoccupied in the business of refilling her cup. For a time she seemed to forget the young man’s presence altogether.

“So you think,” she said at length, having exhausted the possibilities of the coffee cup, “that having no voice, your friend is only wasting her time in—where did you say she was studying?”

“In Paris. I may be wrong, Miss Thompson,” he continued, “but the probabilities are against her. In every branch of art there are at least a hundred who fail for one that succeeds.”

“May I ask what you consider a test of success?” she queried, in spite of her desire to drop the discussion before Bob’s disloyalty drove her to downright hatred of him.

“Why, public opinion, of course,” he said shortly.

“Has your friend ever had an appearance?” She was beginning to hate him already.

“An appearance?”

“Has she ever sung in opera?” Betty kept control of her voice, and her tightly clasped hands were hidden in her lap.

He shook his head. “Oh, no, but I once read an announcement that she was to appear at the Theatre Par-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

nasse. I forget what it was—quite a good rôle, I believe.”

Betty picked up the neglected gardenias and pressed their cool petals against her hot cheek.

“Go on,” she said.

Bob hesitated; he was beginning to wish he had never started on this tack. He had no idea Betty took her voice so seriously.

“Well, to tell the truth——” He pulled nervously at his cigar, and, discovering it to be out, knocked off the ash and relighted it with unusual care. He felt that this business of chastening Betty was a failure from every point of view. The desire to “get even” had completely gone from him; he would be glad now to surrender on any terms, but Betty’s waiting eyes offered him no quarter.

“I didn’t hear the particulars,” he blundered on. “All I know is, it never came to anything.”

“And you’ve no idea of the reason?” Her flushed face was hidden in the gardenias. Their sensitive petals felt what the man could not see.

Bob threw his cigar out of the window. He wished he could throw himself after it.

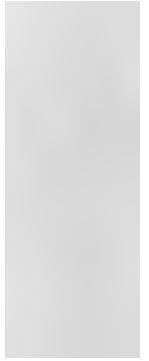
“Oh, well, every one can’t sing in opera. Poor girl, I suppose her voice wasn’t equal to it.”

This was perhaps the most unfortunate speech Robert Baxter ever made. Had he known (and he never did know) the true story of that unfilled engagement, he would have died rather than say what he had just said to Betty. If, by some miracle, Robert Baxter, then in New York, had happened into Betty Thompson’s little apartment on the Champs Élysées that afternoon two years ago, when M. Peletier of the Theatre Parnasse



“Betty!” he cried. “Are you ill?”





## THE QUARREL

---

---

called with the contract for Mlle. Elizabeth Thompson to sign, it might have proved the saddest, if not the last, day of M. Peletier's existence. The very recollection of that afternoon brought again to Betty's beautiful face the white-hot flame of anger that, like a sword of fire, drove the satyr-faced impresario screeching in the fear of death from her apartment, down the headlong stairway, across the crowded boulevard, and into the nearest café, where, over a nerve-fortifying *petit verre*, he wrote the brief note informing Mlle. Elizabeth Thompson, with regrets of the most profound, that he must cancel immediately the engagement of mademoiselle for the Theatre Parnasse, having, after mature deliberation, decided that the voice of mademoiselle, though of the most charming, was not equal to the demands of grand opera.

And now, when Betty pushed back her chair with such violence as to shake the glasses on the table, Bob wondered what was the matter. As she rose the yellowing gardenias dropped to the floor, and it was as if in that moment all their whiteness had gone into Betty's face.

He was on his feet in an instant. She looked as if she were going to faint. His eye went from table to table—except for a waiter or two drifting about at the far end of the great room they were quite alone.

"Betty!" he cried. "Are you ill? For God's sake, what's the matter?"

As he spoke her name the eyes rounded with amazement, then slowly narrowed to an expression that sent a chill through Bob's heart. It was no more like Betty, that look, than the voice that accompanied it.

"So you knew all the time who I was, and yet you spoke to me like that—pretending you didn't know."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Bob tried to speak, but she went on in a low, monotonous, terrible voice, only just raised above a whisper.

"You are a coward, and what you have been saying is a lie—a mean, contemptible, cowardly lie. Now I'm going. I sha'n't see you again."

Her lips were beginning to quiver. She could not trust herself to say another word.

Bob, utterly crushed, bewildered and silenced, walked beside her for appearance's sake to the door of the lift. Without a word, without a look, she stepped inside and the bronze door clanged between them.

Alone in the writing-room, Bob tore up sheet after sheet of the hotel paper in fevered attempts to compose a note to Betty. As he crumpled them up one after another, he stuffed them into his pocket, not stopping to tear them up. The moments were slipping by. At last in desperation, he wrote:

"Betty—For God's sake see me, if only for a moment before I go. My train leaves in half an hour. Bob."

He rang for a waiter and without stopping to reread it, slipped the note into an envelope, directed and sealed it up, and gave it to the man to take to Miss Thompson's room.

After an interminable quarter of an hour the waiter returned. Bob gave him a shilling and snatched the envelope from the tray. He turned it over eagerly—it was his own note, unopened.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A PROBLEM IN VIRTUOUS STRATEGY

**T**HE curate walked back to Ipping House with a lighter heart than he had known for days. It was true he had not carried out his spectacular purpose of running down a criminal, nor had he proved himself a very wonderful detective; in fact, he was still in darkness touching the nature of Hester Storm's wrongdoing; but it had been his privilege to help this girl at a critical moment, and to turn her from evil ways to sincere repentance. As to any future problems or complications, Horatio had no fear, for he knew the good seed was growing in Hester's heart and, if the heart was right, everything else must be right. And he took great satisfaction in immediately destroying the incriminating letter, rending it into small pieces and scattering these toward the lake as he strode buoyantly along the shore path.

Meantime the girl herself, the object of Merle's loving solicitude, sat motionless on the broad, low bench between the friendly fir trees. Dazed, frightened, yet full of a strange joy, Hester was thinking of this extraordinary, this unbelievable thing that had happened. A meek little man, with amusing side whiskers, had spoken to her, had looked into her eyes and, suddenly, her whole life was changed, absolutely and irrevocably changed. She was not and never again would be the girl she had

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

been. That was sure. The words she had spoken with bended head were graven on her memory. She had given her promise to God and to Rosalie, and nothing in the world could make her break it, still——

She gazed out over the lake where the swans were drifting idly, and a smile, half plaintive, half mischievous, formed about her warm, red lips, as she reflected that here was Hester Storm, known on Manhattan Island as a cold-blooded proposition, little Hester, who had gone up against hard games in various cities and gotten away with them—not so bad, her bluffing Grimes with the haughty stare in Charing Cross station—here she was with a big bunch of money right in her hands, you might say, and letting it go, letting the whole thing go and starting all over again because—because she wanted to.

Now her thoughts went back to the minister's program: To be honest, to be kind, to make amends, if she could, for any wrong act—there it was. Well, as to making amends, she would give back the purse. She had stolen it, and she would give it back. That was easy!

No! Not so easy as it seemed, for the purse was in Betty Thompson's golf bag, which was in one of the lockers at the country club, where Mrs. Baxter had left it. And this locker was secured by a key kept in Mrs. Baxter's bureau drawer—also locked. There were infinite complications here. Suppose she were found picking one of these locks?

The penitent laughed ruefully as she reflected that it was just as difficult and dangerous to get the purse now for a good purpose (to return it to the bishop) as it was before to get it for a wicked purpose. Yet the purse must be returned; it must be returned immediately, for

## A PROBLEM IN VIRTUOUS STRATEGY

---

---

any day or hour might bring the discovery of that ill-guarded money, through the blundering luck of some caddy boy or club cleaner or hanger-on about the locker room. And such a discovery would inevitably provoke a new investigation, and that must not be. Hester was sorry for her wrongdoing, but she had no wish to go to jail.

Here, then, was a delicate problem: to steal virtuously a purse already stolen, and give it back to the owner so that he would have no idea (Scotland Yard ditto) whence it came or where it had been or who had turned the trick. Hester pondered this for a long time with the old, keen look in her half-shut eyes.

"It can't be done," she finally decided. "I'd just get in deeper and deeper, and—the first thing I knew I'd be——"

Then, like an inspiration, the solution came. It was perfectly simple, perfectly safe, the bishop should have his property within twenty-four hours, and nobody would be the wiser.

"Sure!" the girl reflected. "That does it. I'll tell her, I'll tell her the whole thing. She'll be sorry to know I'm that kind, but she'll be glad I'm on the level now, and—she'll keep my secret and—*she* can give back the purse."

With a sigh of relief Hester rose from the bench, and, drawing her cloak about her, started down the path. The thing was settled and there was no reason for delay. On the contrary, the sooner she found Miss Thompson and told her the truth the sooner this trouble would be ended, and she would be free to go away. A train to London, a call at the steamship agency—why, she might be on the ocean in two or three days, hurrying back to Rosalie!

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Not with a fortune, to be sure, but she knew that Rosalie would be happier to have her sister back and to hear the great news of her cutting out certain things, happier than if she brought ten fortunes—in the other way.

The girl stopped suddenly as she turned the point beyond the cove. There was the boat landing and the little footbridge leading to the summer house. And there, on a bench beyond the summer house, was Anton, the chauffeur, and she remembered, with a vague feeling of alarm, that he was waiting for her!

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A SCRAP OF PAPER

**S**INCE their strange meeting in Betty Thompson's chamber, the shock-headed chauffeur had made it plain to the pretty sewing-girl that he was deeply smitten with her charms. The fact that she had seen him in New York and remembered a gold tooth, also the injured ear of his friend with the blue handkerchief, amounted to nothing, for, after this single flash, her memory had failed her and, anyway, what if he had taken a glass of beer with Red Leary in a Forty-second street rathskeller!

The point was that Anton was now ardently and aggressively in love with Hester. Twice he had put his arm around her, once he had tried to kiss her, and daily he had urged her to meet him some evening at the garage for a joy ride. He had a sixty-horsepower car at his disposal during various odd hours and he saw no reason why pleasant reciprocity relations should not be established between himself and this alluring young woman.

"You're a peach, kid," he had whispered one afternoon in the conservatory; "you've got me going all kinds of ways with your eyes and your red lips and—say, come down to the garage after supper for a little whirl. Do you get me?"

Hester had laughed and shaken her head; then she had



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

half consented to his teasing, knowing well she would not come.

The next day Anton brought her a splendid bunch of roses and continued his pleading. He was crazy about her; she had the dandiest shape and—he would treat her right if she'd only come down and—then he tried to kiss her.

There were two reasons why Hester had not altogether discouraged these advances: she could not deny herself the feminine satisfaction of exasperating an over-zealous suitor by making promises which she had no intention of keeping, and she did not wish to incur Anton's enmity. She distrusted this man partly through that vague memory in the rathskeller, partly on general principles. And after the second broken appointment she sent him a civil note pretexting a headache.

The next day he had begged her, almost with tears in his eyes, to meet him that afternoon at five o'clock in the summer house by the lake—for a few minutes. And she had promised faithfully to come. Anton felt sure she would really come this time, and in her honor had donned his best gray suit and a new straw hat with red and black band, which, with his light malacca cane, gave him quite a smart appearance.

"This is where I land her," he said to himself, as he strolled across the foot-bridge, sharp on the stroke of five.

But alas for the hopes of lovers! Half an hour passed, three-quarters of an hour and no Hester.

"She's thrown me down!" he muttered angrily and, leaving the summer house, he strode along the path, switching the ground savagely with his cane. There was no doubt about it, she was giving him the big laugh. Lit-

## A SCRAP OF PAPER

---

tle devil! If he only had something on her so he could make her come!

And now a singular thing happened, one of those odd coincidences that give to trifles the importance of great events. A gentle breeze was blowing down the lake and, borne by this, there came fluttering along what seemed to be a small white butterfly and it lighted directly in Anton's path. The chauffeur switched at it with his cane and missed it, switched at it again and missed it again. Then he saw that it was not a butterfly at all, but a small square of white paper no bigger than a postage stamp and he wondered how it was that this floating fragment had come to rest balanced exactly on its edge. It certainly was strange! What kept it poised there quivering on that moss bank? Why did it not fall over on one side or the other?

Anton stooped and picked up the piece of paper and, seeing some writing, he glanced at it carelessly. Good Lord! What was this! He stopped short and stared at the words, then, lifting his hat, he ran his fingers through his hair and for some minutes stood absorbed in thought.

"By the holy jumping Christopher Columbus!" he said slowly. "I believe I've got it." And sitting down on a bench he continued to study the paper. Presently he took out a gold cigarette case and a moment later he was blowing out toward the peaceful lake the fragrance of Turkish tobacco with little nods and chuckles of extreme satisfaction.

It was at this moment that Hester, hastening on her search for Betty Thompson, appeared at the turn of the path and found herself face to face with Anton.

"Ah! Little one!" he exclaimed, rising and going for-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

ward smilingly to meet her. "So you thought you'd show up after all!"

Hester made no effort to hide her annoyance.

"I didn't come here to see you. I had forgotten all about you," she said coldly.

"Don't say so," he sneered. "Pretty poor memory you've got, kid. Better take something for it."

She noticed a change in this man. Before this, with all his slangy, bantering ways, Anton had always been a suppliant for her favor, eager to please and ready to obey, but now she recognized in his tone a certain swaggering assurance, as if he felt himself master of the situation.

"He's trying to bluff me," she thought. Then aloud "You'll have to excuse me. I'm in a hurry," and she started on.

"Oh, I don't know," he laughed. "Perhaps you can give me a little time—say an hour or two."

She flashed a scornful look at him.

"If you wait until I spend an hour with you you'll wait a long time, Mr. Anton."

"Oh, no! Not so long, Miss—er—what did you say your name is?"

She faced him unflinchingly. "What do you mean by talking to me like this?" she demanded.

The chauffeur took a pull at his cigarette, then blew out the smoke slowly.

"I'll tell you, girl, what I mean," he answered, eyeing her keenly through half-shut lids. "I mean that from now on we quit fooling and you take orders from me. Understand?"

She tossed her head defiantly. "Oh, I guess not!"



## A SCRAP OF PAPER

---

---

"I guess yes and I'll begin right now. I want you to be at the garage to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"No."

"Yes. You'll be at the garage to-morrow morning at ten o'clock because I say so, Miss Jenny Regan—I beg your pardon, I should say Miss Hester Storm!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### DELIVERING THE GOODS

**I**N spite of her indignant protests and her contrary plans, Hester appeared at the garage the next morning shortly before ten. There seemed nothing else for her to do. Hour after hour through the night the troubled girl had sought for some different course and had found nothing. Somehow this chauffeur had discovered her other name, the name she had given to the police, Jenny Regan, and she could not make any move until she found out how much more he knew. She could not carry out her plan of restitution nor confide in Betty Thompson until she learned what was back of Anton's ugly, threatening attitude. He was not bluffing, she felt sure of that.

The chauffeur received her with a business-like nod. He was cleaning the big car.

"Hello, little one! I took the old man to the station this morning. I'll be through in a minute. Sit down." And she watched him give the last skillful touches to the shining machine.

"Now, then, just a second to wash these paws of mine. There! And another to light a cigarette. Have one?" He offered her the open case.

"Thanks, I don't smoke."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You don't have to be so careful. We're alone."

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

She tried to hide her uneasiness under a careless tone.

"You're rather fresh this morning, Mr. Anton."

He drew up a wooden chair and seated himself so close to her that their knees were almost touching.

"Now listen," he said, and his eyes were on her keenly. "We're going to talk straight. I'll tell you how we stand and—first I'll tell you this. I like you, girlie, but I'm onto you."

"Onto me?" she echoed.

"Don't give me the baby stare. I know you've got pretty eyes, but you're a crook, kiddo, with a record in New York City, and you stole that bishop's purse!"

"You don't say!" she laughed scornfully. "Anything else?"

"Yes. I want to be in on the game. I figure that something went wrong after you swiped the leather that day on the train—you slipped a cog somehow, and—you came up here. I don't know why you came, but—you're going to tell me."

"Indeed!" she mocked.

"You may not find it so funny in a minute."

There was something sinister in his tone that filled her with terror.

"You—you say you like me and—then you accuse me of frightful things," she faltered.

"Nothing frightful about it! You got away with five thousand pounds. Fine! I read about it in the newspapers. Here!" He drew a folded clipping from his pocket. "'One occupant of the carriage was Miss Jenny Regan, an American lady, who succeeded in convincing the police that she had nothing to do with the robbery.' Oh, no, nothing! Clever girl, Miss Jenny Regan, but now she'll have to show me."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

The chauffeur laughed with cynical satisfaction, and his gold tooth gleamed. How Hester hated him!

"Then you think I am this American woman, Miss Jenny—what was her name?"

"Regan. Yes, I know you are."

"How do you know it?"

He searched in his breast pocket, then in his side pockets, and finally in his cigarette case.

"Ah! Here it is. I put it in the cigarette case to protect it." He produced a small square of white paper, and held it before her eyes with a smile of triumph. "Ever see this before, kiddo?"

Hester's face went white, and all the strength seemed to go out of her body as she read the postscript of her own letter to Rosalie, the fateful letter that she had torn in two and thrown into the fireplace. By some whim of fate the fluttering fragment that had sailed to Anton's feet, after the curate's well-meant scattering of the pieces, was a portion of this letter, and contained, in the girl's own handwriting, the most damaging words of the epistle: "Please remember not to address me as Jenny Regan, but as Hester Storm!"

"Rather jars you, don't it?" he said as he watched her. "I suppose you'll say it isn't your writing? Want me to compare it with the note you sent me?"

"It is my writing," she admitted, "it's from a letter I wrote to my sister, but that doesn't make me a thief."

"Ah, it's your writing! Then you go under two names?"

"I may have had a reason for—taking another name."

"I'll bet you had a reason! And you were in the railway carriage when this purse was stolen?"

"I—I didn't say so."

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

"Well, were you? I want to know."

She hesitated a moment, then flung him a look of defiance.

"Yes, I was. What of it? You read what the paper said. I had nothing to do with the robbery."

Anton smiled. "Excuse me, girlie, the paper said you succeeded in convincing the police that you had nothing to do with it. Which isn't the same thing. Now don't get snappy." He patted her playfully on the knee.

The hot blood mounted to Hester's cheeks.

"Keep your hands off me," she warned him. "And, if you think yourself cleverer than the police you'd better offer them your services."

The words were hastily spoken and immediately regretted. If there was one thing in the world Hester wished to avoid it was any entanglement with Scotland Yard. The very name made her shiver.

"Not a bad idea!" reflected the chauffeur. "I may try it, if I can't fix up a deal with you." Here he lighted another cigarette. "But don't you worry, we'll make a deal all right."

"What kind of a deal?"

"I'll help you out of the tangle you're in and we'll whack up on the five thousand."

"You still think I took that purse?"

"Sure, you took it."

"If I had five thousand pounds would I be sewing in a place like this? Would I?"

He thought a moment, frowning. "I know, that's a good line of talk, but—I tell you there was a kink in the job, and—see here, what was it? What ever brought you to this Godforsaken place?"

"What ever brought you here?"



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"I have to earn my living."

"Well, are you the only one?"

"Besides, I was working for Baxter; I came with him, but you dropped down out of nowhere—with a fake name."

"That name seems to worry you, Mr. Anton."

"Jenny Regan? Just a little. I happen to know who the lady is. One of the slickest thieves we've turned out. And she don't have to do sewing for a living, either. I guess not. Come, kiddo, do we make the deal?"

"No!" she answered fiercely.

"Little spitfire! I'll tame you yet."

"Try it," she said.

The chauffeur rose quietly and went to a shelf, where he took down a box of paper.

"Just to show you how easy it is," he continued, returning to the girl. "I take this sheet of paper—so, and this pencil—so, and I write to Scotland Yard that Jenny Regan, who was mixed up in the bishop's purse affair, is not an American lady, the way they thought, but an American pickpocket, well known at Police Headquarters in New York City."

"It's a lie!"

"You must be pretty well known for me to have heard of you. Then I tell 'em this dangerous crook is hiding in Ippingford under the name of Hester Storm. How about it? Think that will help your game any?"

"You—you wouldn't do that?" trembled the girl.

"I wouldn't?" He felt that her courage was breaking, and he pushed his advantage. "Let me tell you this, little one, that letter will be written and sent to-day if you don't come off your haughty perch. Now, then?"

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

She saw herself beaten; this man was relentless, he would stop at nothing, and—she must make the best terms she could.

“How do I know you’ll—play fair?” she hesitated. “There’s a reward offered for information about that purse and——”

“A reward of a hundred pounds! What’s a hundred pounds with five thousand to divide? Do you take me for a fool?”

“No.”

“Well?”

Hester was accustomed to quick decisions. She had learned in a hard school to judge men, and she knew this scoundrel was acting only in a spirit of greed. There was no danger of his betraying her.

“All right,” she yielded in a low tone, “I—I’ll come down.”

“Good girl!”

“I took the purse from the bishop but his nobbs squealed before I could make my getaway, and when the coppers came in I was very near caught with the goods, only——”

“Only what?”

“Only there was a lady in the carriage, a friend of the bishop’s, and—she had a golf bag with her, and—say, boy, I worked a new stunt.” Unconsciously Hester was dropping back into the Tenderloin vernacular.

Anton pulled excitedly at his short mustache, and his lips worked nervously.

“Say, kid, you don’t mean——”

She nodded slowly. “It was all I could do. They searched me, and if I hadn’t dropped the leather into that golf bag——”

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

He looked at her sharply.

"You're telling me you hid this purse in a golf bag that belonged to another party?"

"Sure I did. I'd have been pinched if I hadn't."

"Who was she—this lady?"

"Miss Thompson, Baxter's secretary."

"What?"

"That's right. That's why I'm here. Now you know the whole thing."

He stared at her in half suspicion.

"You young devil! Are you lying to me?" Then, suddenly, he remembered. "No, by Jimminy, you're not! You had her golf bag in your hands that day—by the looking-glass!"

Hester nodded. "In two more minutes I'd have had the purse out, if you'd left me alone."

"Then—then you saw the purse?" he questioned eagerly. "It's there—in the bag?"

Hester nodded again. "It was there."

"Five thousand pounds knocking around in a golf bag!" His small eyes burned with covetous fire. "And she knows nothing about it—this secretary?"

"Nothing."

Anton sat silent, running his fingers back through his hair over the white lock.

"I've got him worrying now," reflected the girl.

"And—where is the golf bag—now?" he asked.

"Mrs. Baxter borrowed it and left it at the club house."

"You found that out?"

"Yes."

"Where—in the club house?"

"In one of the lockers—Mrs. Baxter's locker."

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

"I see." He was silent again. "That was four days ago?"

"Yes."

"How many times has the bag been used?"

"How do I know?"

"Haven't you watched it? Haven't you tried to get it?"

"You make me tired! How could I watch it—or get it—out in the club house?"

The chauffeur looked at her pityingly.

"It's just as well you've got a man in this game, girlie. It won't take me long to get that bag out of the club house. See that clock?" He pointed to a timepiece ticking noisily on the wall. "It's half-past ten. Bet you twenty dollars against two smooth kisses that I have the bag here within an hour."

Hester laughed, half coquettishly. "I don't bet my kisses."

"No?" He leaned forward eagerly and caught one of her hands. "What do you do with them?"

"I—I keep them," she said with a teasing glance.

He held her hand a moment, her soft, warm hand, then pushed it from him roughly.

"We'll see about that later on. Now it's business. Come, kid!" He pointed to the car.

"You're not going to——?"

"We're going to the country club. Quick!"

"Suppose some one sees us?"

"There's nobody here that counts except Mr. Robert. We'll take a chance on him. If he says anything you tell him Mrs. Baxter left orders for you to bring back Miss Thompson's golf bag from the club. Get me?"

"Good work!" she nodded.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Didn't think of that, did you, girlie?" He opened the polished door. "In you go—behind!"

Without further protest Hester seated herself on the comfortable leather cushions, and a moment later they were speeding down the drive.

"Oh! Stop at the lodge," she remembered. "I want to get my cloak."

Anton halted the car at the big gate and amused himself for a few moments making faces at An Petronia, who was playing in the roadway. Then he asked her preposterous questions about her dollies. Could they swim? Did she let them go to moving picture shows? Were they allowed to smoke Turkish cigarettes? One of the chauffeur's favorite diversions was teasing An Petronia.

"Say, you took your time!" he remarked presently, when Hester reappeared arrayed in her familiar scarlet garment.

"Go on! I'll tell you why," she said in a low tone. Then, when they were on the main road, "I thought I'd make sure there aren't any more letters lying around in my room that might make trouble."

He nodded his approval of this precaution. And now they were silent for two or three minutes, while the machine flew over a smooth mile leading to the country club.

"Do you know how you're going to work this, boy?" she questioned anxiously, as they swung into the beautifully kept grounds of the Ippingford golf course.

"Sure! Mrs. Baxter has sent her maid, that's you, to get her golf bag. She wants the bag down at Brighton. And the bag's in Mrs. Baxter's locker."

"How about the key?"

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

"Mrs. Baxter has mislaid the key. The woman in charge of the locker room will open the locker for you. See?"

"I see," answered Hester, and as the car drew up under the white columned porch of the club house she hopped out nimbly. "I won't be a minute." Then she started eagerly for the door.

"Wait!" called Anton, with a flash of distrust. "Come back! I'll get the bag myself." And, passing her, he disappeared within the house just as a party of smartly dressed ladies came out and stood chatting and laughing on the broad piazza.

Hester climbed back into the auto and waited, biting her lips. And presently a hard-featured woman appeared, followed by the chauffeur carrying a golf bag. One glance showed the girl that it was *the* golf bag—there was no doubt about it.

"Are you Mrs. Baxter's maid?" demanded the woman in a shrill voice, while the ladies stared.

"Yes."

"Your chauffeur says Mrs. Baxter told him to get this golf bag?"

"That's right," smiled Hester pleasantly.

The locker woman still seemed dissatisfied. "It's queer," she grumbled. "Mrs. Baxter told me to be careful of this bag because she had borrowed it."

"Exactly," smiled Hester, "and now Mrs. Baxter wants to return it. In here, please. Thank you." She placed the bag on the seat beside her and handed the woman a two-shilling piece. Then to Anton with a grand air, "Home, please. Mrs. Baxter is waiting."

Anton touched his cap respectfully, but did not move.

"I'll have to ask you to sit on the front seat, miss;

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

one of the back springs is broken. Let me take this for you." And he placed the golf bag close to the steering wheel. With a movement of annoyance Hester followed the bag and seated herself next to the driver. Thus, side by side and mutually distrustful, they shot out of the grounds with Betty Thompson's much-coveted golf bag between them.

"We've turned the trick—we've got the goods," Anton whispered exultingly. Then, slowing up the machine, he peered down among the golf clubs. "Can you see it, kid?"

"Lean the bag toward me. That's right." She pushed open the clubs and gave a cry of satisfaction. "Ah! There! Way down at the bottom! Don't you see?"

The chauffeur looked again, and this time made out distinctly the fat, brown wallet, clasped by its elastic band, that was still lying safe in its singular hiding-place.

"Holy spoons," he muttered. "We've got it! You see what a little nerve will do."

"Didn't I help you out with the cranky dame?"

"You sure did. You were great, girlie." He gripped the wheel tighter as they passed an automobile. "We'd better turn off through the woods. Too many people here—and—we've got to talk things over."

"Talk what over?" she asked innocently.

He looked at her and was silent, his eyes drinking in the loveliness of her face and figure.

"Say, you certainly are a little beauty! You've got the reddest lips and the sweetest shape!" He slipped his left arm around the girl's lithe waist and drew her toward him. They were running slowly along the woodland road, through a grove of trees.

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

Hester only resisted slightly, but there was a tremor of unhappiness in her voice as she said: "You must think a lot of me when you wouldn't even trust me to go into the club house for the golf bag."

"Ah! You noticed that," he smiled complacently.

"Did I?" She nestled closer. "And you wouldn't let me have the bag on the back seat."

"Would you have left me alone with it—on the back seat? I'll bet you wouldn't. You're the sweetest kid I ever saw, Jenny, and I'm going to love you to death—yes, I am, but—wait!" He brought the car to a standstill in a deeply shaded spot by the road-side. Then, without further preliminaries, he caught her in his arms and tried to kiss her, while she struggled against him, turning away her face.

"No, I won't," she panted. "If you don't trust me enough to——"

"Trust you? Why should I trust you? You're a crook! And you're sore on me. Don't you suppose I know it? Hold on! Keep those two little hands where I can see 'em."

She looked at him indignantly. "Do you think I'd be silly enough to—try any funny work—here?"

"Do I think so? Don't make me laugh. There's a fortune in that golf bag and—come now! Put those two hands outside your cloak, one on top of the other. That's right. Now leave 'em there. I'm not taking any chances with you."

"This is a fine way to win a girl," she protested, but as if frightened, she left her neatly gloved hands crossed obediently before her.

"Don't you worry about the winning part," he laughed.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

She faced him angrily. "You'll never have a chance to——"

But he did not let her finish. Claspng her again in his arms, he held her, struggling desperately, and, as he saw an opening, pressed his lips to her flaming cheeks, to her white forehead, and, finally, as his strength conquered hers, to her unwilling red mouth.

"There! I told you I would," he triumphed. "A man don't have to trust a girl to kiss her. We'll watch each other, Jenny, when we're doing business, but, say, this is pleasure, and—once more—God, I like your lips!"

He held her, unresisting now, his mouth crushed down upon hers, and, even as he feasted on her sweetness, he was sufficiently master of himself to note that her two hands were still crossed before her on her cloak.

A moment later, the long, hoarse whistle of the new paper mill in Ippingford warned him that time was passing.

"What! Twelve o'clock!" He listened. "This won't do. We must get a move on. I'll just fish this out, and then we'll hustle back."

He started to reach down into the golf bag, but Hester stopped him.

"Wait!" she ordered. "You say we'll watch each other. You're dead right, we will. And I want to know who's going to keep that purse if you take it out of the bag?"

"Don't be a fool! We'll divide the money and you can keep the purse for a souvenir."

"When will we divide the money?"

"As soon as we get to the garage."

"Why not now?"

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

He shook his head impatiently. "Because I'm late. Didn't you hear that whistle? Do you want to get me in bad with Baxter?"

She hesitated, watching him keenly. "Don't try to get gay with me, boy, for I'll do you up, sure. You know I've got something on you now."

He turned with a movement of alarm. "What?"

"If there's any trouble and it comes to a show down," she answered in a cold, even tone, "just remember that you're in this thing as deep as I am. You told that locker woman that Mrs. Baxter sent you for the golf bag, all those ladies heard it, and they saw you take the bag!"

"That's all right," he answered carelessly. "There won't be any trouble, if you do what I say."

"Go ahead, take the purse, but, remember, boy, if you wait one minute at the garage before dividing that money," she leaned close to him, and her black eyes blazed so fiercely that he started in alarm, "if you wait one minute, or try any flimflam game on me, Mr. Anton, you'll be sorry for it. That's all."

At this moment, just as Anton was about to brave her objections and transfer the purse from the bag to his pocket, the course of events was changed by the appearance of a barefooted small boy, who emerged unexpectedly from the woods and stood staring at them with a sort of dull impudence.

"That settles it," muttered the exasperated chauffeur. "We'll wait till we get to the garage." Then, stepping out, he cranked up the machine, and in a moment they were off at top speed.

Five minutes later they were back at Ipping House, and, as they passed the lodge, An Petronia called out

---

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

shrilly to Anton that Mr. Robert Baxter was looking for him.

"I told you," frowned the chauffeur.

"Don't worry, boy. Get busy," urged Hester, as they stopped at the garage.

Leaving the car, they quickly entered the low building and closed the door behind them. Anton carried the golf bag, and, without further parley, laid it down on a work bench, and, reaching in his arm, drew forth the purse.

"Now I just want to say one thing, girlie, before we divide this money."

"Wait!" she warned him, lifting a hand. There was a quick step outside, then a click of the lock, and Anton had barely time to thrust the purse into his coat pocket when the door opened and Robert Baxter entered.

"What's going on here? Where have you been with the car?" the young man asked in sharp displeasure.

"Mrs. Baxter told Hester to get this golf bag, sir," answered the chauffeur. "Mrs. Baxter borrowed it from Miss Thompson, and she left it at the country club."

"Oh!" He turned to Hester. "You'd better take the bag to Miss Thompson's room."

"Yes, sir."

Hester picked up the golf bag and moved slowly toward the door, her eyes sending desperate messages to Anton. To which, as she passed out, he answered with a reassuring nod.

"I've been wanting the car myself," said Robert.

"I'm sorry, sir. We were delayed by a loose bolt in the rear frame. I must put in a new one."

"How long will it take?"

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

---

---

"I'll have to take the frame apart, sir. I'm afraid it will take me an hour."

"Very well. Bring up the car in an hour."

Anton touched his cap as young Baxter strolled off, leaving the garage door open.

The chauffeur waited a minute or so, looked about him cautiously, and then went back into a small storeroom in the rear, where he was sure of being alone and unobserved. He closed the door of the storeroom, locked it, and, at last, with a thrill of excitement, drew the bishop's purse from his pocket. He held it a moment in delicious expectation, then stripped off the elastic band and looked inside.

"Damnation!" he cried, and his face was black with rage.

Then, dashing the empty purse to the ground, he flung open the door and strode angrily across the lawn in pursuit of Hester.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LOCKED DOOR

**M**EANTIME Hester had crossed the lawn and entered the conservatory. She carried the golf bag by its supporting strap and walked quickly. She knew that the conservatory opened directly into the library where the Reverend Horatio Merle was reading the morning paper and her idea was to go straight to the curate and tell him the whole truth. In the absence of Miss Thompson this was the only thing to do. If Anton followed her, as might happen, Mr. Merle would be a protection, for, in his presence, the chauffeur would not dare make trouble. He would wait to get Hester alone, never suspecting that she would be capable, in her wildest dreams, of giving back this great sum of money.

The girl paused to enjoy the warm fragrance of the lilies. It reminded her of something way back—something sad and strange. What was it? Oh, yes! Now she knew. It was the funeral of Billy Connor—"Diamond Billy," the confidence man, over in Brooklyn. She had gone with Maggie Connor and Rosalie. Poor old Billy. He drank himself to death after they shut down on horse-racing in New York State. How she cried when the organ played and they all knelt down! That was the only time she had ever been in a church or tried to pray.

"To be honest, to be kind. . . . To make amends for

## THE LOCKED DOOR

---

---

any wrong act. To ask God for strength against temptation."

Now, in her need, these words that the curate had taught her came back to her mind and comforted her. This had been a hard fight with Anton and she had won out. She had rescued the money and would give it back, as she had promised—that was something.

Hester smiled as she pictured Anton's face when he opened the purse. The nerve of the man to think he could get the best of her at a game like that, her own game! "Now put your two little hands outside your cloak and keep 'em there!" Silly Anton! Didn't he know that Hester Storm had worked that trick when she was a twelve-year-old kid sneaking leathers from shopping guys on Sixth avenue cars? Two little hands outside your cloak! Ha! Two little gloved hands—very innocent—and one of them a fake, joined onto a fake arm and the whole thing strapped from the shoulder! Then if the man gets gay and hugs you in the automobile, and pretty soon gets crazy and kisses you, while you wriggle and twist and keep him busy—and then get busy yourself with your real arm down in the golf bag—why, it was too easy! It was a wonder Anton didn't get wise when she stopped so long at the lodge. Those shoulder straps take time to fasten on.

With a thrill of professional pride and a sigh of half regret, Hester pressed her hand to the bosom of her dress, where the bundle of crisp banknotes crackled alluringly. Five thousand pounds! Twenty-five thousand dollars! And it must be given back! No fiddling around, either! It was not good for a girl like her to have twenty-five thousand dollars that belonged to somebody else in her clothes. Not good at all!

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

She walked straight to the wide double doors with their green portières that separated the conservatory from the library, and, bracing herself for this ordeal with the Reverend Merle, she turned the knob.

"Rosalie will be glad," she thought, as she pressed against the door. To her surprise nothing moved or yielded, and the girl realized, with a sudden sinking of the heart, that the library door was locked.

Hester tapped lightly on the panel, then louder, but no one came. She listened, with her ear close to the door, but there was no sound from the adjoining room. Strange! Mr. Merle must have gone out. Ordinarily there would have been nothing alarming in this, but now to the agitated girl it assumed the proportions of a disaster. She had counted on giving this money immediately to the clergyman, but, with the clergyman absent—

Seized with alarm, Hester darted back to the door of the conservatory, the door in the ground glass wall that led in from the lawn. She opened this door just a crack and looked out, then instantly closed it and turned the key. Not a hundred yards distant, Anton was hurrying toward this very spot.

In the presence of danger Hester's mind acted quickly. The essential thing now was to hide this money. But where? She looked wildly about her. In the center of the conservatory stood a small, low table covered with potted plants. There was a drawer in this table. Hester put down the golf bag and pulled the drawer open. Lengths of twine and wire, some gardener's tools and a lot of seed catalogues. She shook her head and pushed the drawer shut. Anton would look there at once. She must find some simple place that he would not think of.

## THE LOCKED DOOR

---

Perhaps she could bury the money in one of these big tubs that held the palm trees, but no, there wasn't time. [t was maddening!

In this emergency the girl's eyes fell upon a small standard rose bush growing in a gilt basket. It was a plant that Lionel and the countess had purchased at the Progressive Mothers' bazaar. Hester bent down eagerly to see if there was a space between the basket and the flower pot and, in trying to move the latter, she caught the stem of the rose-bush, whereupon to her surprise the bush itself, with the earth about its roots, detached itself from the flower pot so that she was able to lift the plant and a cylinder of dry earth entirely out of the pot. Ah! This might do. And a moment later she had laid the banknotes in the bottom of the pot and replaced the cylinder of earth above them. To the casual glance there was not the slightest indication that the rose-bush had been tampered with.

Now, in desperate haste, Hester flung off her scarlet cloak and, with a few deft movements, loosened the shoulder straps that held the false arm in place. Anton might search her and, if he found this—There! it was off! And none too soon, for at that very moment the loose-jointed figure of the chauffeur appeared, silhouetted in sinister black, against the ground glass wall of the conservatory. A moment later he was trying to open the door, clicking savagely at the lock.

Where could she hide the false arm? Anton would be here in a second. There was another door at the end of the conservatory where he could come in. She dared not lock this other door, for then he would know that she was guilty. But the false arm? High up along the wall, higher up than she could reach, ran a wide shelf



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

ranged with tin cans and packages of seed and coils of rubber hose. It was the best she could do, and, with a quick movement, Hester flung the false member upward so that it touched the ceiling and then fell out of sight behind a rusty watering pot. As she did so she saw Anton's shadow nearing the other door. Well, she was ready for him. Wait! Her cloak! There!

And now, partly to hide her agitation, partly with a feminine idea of taking the aggressive in a bad cause, Hester stepped to a telephone fixed against the wall near the library door. What was the telephone number on that card she had picked up in the garage? Ah, yes! And in the very last second before the chauffeur entered she took up the receiver, placing her hand so that the little finger, unperceived, held down the hook and there was no communication.

Thus, when the chauffeur burst in, boiling with anger, Hester Storm, attired in her scarlet cloak and perfectly calm, was talking in a natural and business-like way to the unresponsive green-painted wall of the conservatory.

"Hello! Yes, Mr. Henderson," she was saying, apparently absorbed in her telephoning and quite unconscious that Anton was present. "I understand. I'll report to-morrow as usual. What? You don't want me to call up 724 Chelsea? Oh, I see."

As she pretended to listen, the girl held the transmitter so that she could watch her adversary's face in the nickel-plate surface. It was evident that his surprise and alarm were genuine.

"Very well, Mr. Henderson," she concluded. "I will telephone to the house. Good-by, sir." And, hanging up the receiver, she turned innocently toward Anton.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "When did you come?"

## THE LOCKED DOOR

---

---

He strode toward her with an ugly look. "Who were you telephoning to?"

"No one in particular, a—a friend of mine," she answered with simulated embarrassment.

"A friend named Henderson?" he demanded.

She shook her head. "You've got your wires twisted. I don't know anyone by that name."

"You called up 724 Chelsea. I heard you."

"Well, what of it?"

"You said you were going to report there to-morrow? What do you mean by that?"

Hester looked him steadily in the eyes, then, going close to him, she spoke with a semblance of concentrated anger.

"If you think you can run me off on a side-track like this, little chauffeur boy, let me tell you you've got another guess coming. I want to know where is my part of that money?"

He swore violently. "You know — — well where it is."

"What?"

"You took the money, my share and yours."

"So that's your game! That's the kind of a cheap skate you are!" She seemed to tremble with rage. "Remember what I told you. You can't flimflam me. I—I won't stand for it."

Her bosom heaved, her nostrils dilated and her Spanish eyes burned on him so fiercely that the chauffeur hesitated. Was it possible she was on the level? Had someone else taken the money?

"There was nothing in that purse," he said sullenly.

"You mean there is nothing in it," she sneered. "I suppose you'll show it to me—empty? Ha!"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"It is empty and it was empty. You got away with the stuff and I know it."

"How did I get away with it? You wouldn't let me touch the bag or move my hands. I suppose I took it with my feet?"

Anton scowled and was silent. "I don't know how you got it, but——"

Suddenly he caught her arm and drew her sharply to him.

"Leave me alone," she struggled.

He held her in his powerful grip and, with business-like thoroughness, proceeded to press his hands over her garments until he had satisfied himself that the bank notes were not concealed about her person.

"Little devil! You've hidden it somewhere," and he pushed her from him savagely, glaring at her.

"You—you——" she tried to brave him again, but her words failed her. He had hurt her and shamed her with his rough handling, and, frightened now, she sheltered herself in a woman's last defense, she burst into tears.

Whereupon, Anton, man-like, began to weaken. After all, he did not know that she had taken the money from the purse. He had followed her quickly and found her telephoning—telephoning to Henderson. That was another queer thing, but, anyway, it always took him three or four minutes to get Henderson, so she wouldn't have had time to hide the money. Besides, how did she get it? He had watched her like a hawk, even while he was kissing her. And it was true the golf bag had been four days at the club house. Many things may happen to a golf bag in four days.

"Say, kid, don't cry," he relented. "I'm sore about the money, but—maybe you didn't take it."

## THE LOCKED DOOR

---

ester wept on inconsolable.

Maybe somebody got away with it at the club house," continued.

"You—you don't believe anything I say," she sobbed. Well, you don't believe anything I say, do you? You : I took the stuff myself, don't you?" he retorted.

His seemed to Hester the moment for a more con-  
fident attitude and she agreed, still sniffing and dab-  
bing at her eyes with her handkerchief, that it was barely  
possible someone at the club had stolen the money.

But there's one thing I want to know, girlie, and I  
want it straight," the chauffeur insisted. "How did you  
manage to be telephoning Henderson just now?"

Hester dried her tears and smiled faintly. Now she  
was the victim of her own mystification. What plausible  
excuse could she invent for telephoning to a man about  
whom she knew absolutely nothing?

"What do you care about Henderson?" she laughed.

"I care a good deal. Come, now!" It was plain that  
he took this telephone incident very seriously.

"Henderson is a—a party I'm working for," she ven-  
tured.

"When you do know someone by that name? You  
said you didn't."

"I looked at him reproachfully. "I don't have to  
know him personally to work for him, do I?"

"What kind of work do you do?"

She hesitated, biting her lips, first the lower, then the  
upper one, until they were red like cherries, and all  
the while trying to imagine what kind of work it could be  
that she was doing for Henderson. If she only had  
a faint idea who Henderson was! What a fool she  
had been to get herself into this tangle!

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"You know what the work is, boy, or you can come pretty near to guessing," she answered, with a wise dropping of the eyelids.

"You're making reports to Henderson? Is that it? Don't lie. I heard you on the phone."

Hester clutched at this guiding straw. "Well, what of it? When I came to Ippingford I—I didn't know you and—it was a—a chance to pick up some easy money." She was feeling her way, wondering where this glib improvisation would lead her.

"You didn't know me?" he scowled. "What's that got to do with it?"

She leaned forward and patted his hand playfully. "Now don't you be cross, Anton. You know the little fat man with the brown derby hat?"

"No."

"Yes, you do. The one who does business for Henderson, the one who stutters."

"Never saw him."

"You didn't? Well, I saw him. The day after I came here he got hold of me at the lodge and—we had a walk and—he said there was a party named Henderson who wanted to get a line on Baxter's chauffeur—that's you—and—the end of it was I agreed to telephone 724 Chelsea every day."

"The devil you did!" Anton was so disturbed by this that he thrust both hands into his mane of black hair and sat silent.

A moment later an electric bell echoed through the house.

"Someone at the front door, some caller," muttered Anton. Then, looking at his watch. "I've got to get out of here. Young Baxter wants the car."

## THE LOCKED DOOR

---

"And I must take this golf bag to Miss Thompson's room," she remembered.

"No hurry about that. Leave it in the library. We don't care what becomes of the old bag now." Anton walked slowly toward the door, biting at his mustache.

"All right, boy."

He stepped out on the lawn, but turned back. "Oh! About Henderson! If it's all the same to you——"

"I know what you want," she anticipated. "I'll talk to you before I telephone him again, and—buck up, boy, I'll give him reports after this that'll boost your game. See?"

"Good girl!" And with a wave of his hand, the chauffeur disappeared.

Hester drew a long sigh of relief. Talk about excitement! And now what should she do with the money? It was out of the question to leave five thousand pounds in the bottom of a flower pot without even a purse to protect it. The golf bag was better than that, but——

She started at the sound of voices and footsteps in the library. Presently there came a rattling at the door and the turning of a key in the lock and a moment later the Reverend Horatio Merle appeared, followed by Ferdinand Spooner, secretary of the Progressive Mothers' Society.

"My dear Mr. Spooner, I'm extremely sorry. I thought they might be in the conservatory," said the curate, peering about. "Ah, my child!" he beamed, as he saw Hester, who, on the instant, had caught up the golf bag.

"Mr. Robert Baxter told me to put this bag away," the girl explained. "It belongs to Miss Thompson."

"Quite so," approved Mr. Merle. "And would you

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

see if you can find the Countess Clendennin and Mr. Fitz-Brown. Say to them that Mr. Spooner has called."

"Mr. Ferdinand Spooner, secretary of the Progressive Mothers' Society," put in the latter, puffing out his red cheeks and blowing himself up with stiff self-importance. "You may add that I have called in regard to various articles purchased by Mr. Fitz-Brown and the Countess Clendennin at the recent fair given by the Progressive Mothers. Ah, there is one of the articles!" He pointed to the rose bush. "That beautiful rose bush in the gilt basket. Is it not exquisite, Mr. Merle?"

"Exquisite!" murmured Merle, rubbing his hands devotionally. "Hurry, my child! Tell them Mr. Ferdinand Spooner has called in regard to the rose bush and the other articles."

Hester stared for a moment in dismay and then went slowly from the room.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### UNDER THE ROSE

**N**EVER did Horatio Merle show more sweetly the spirit of Christian humility than during this brief encounter with Ferdinand Spooner. The very sight of Spooner was abhorrent to the gentle curate, the name of Spooner he detested, and all memories of Spooner filled the little man with inexpressible pain, for it was Spooner who was chiefly connected in his mind with that lamentable afternoon at St. Timothy's when Horatio had failed to put in an appearance. It was Spooner who had made the opening address on this occasion and it was Spooner who afterward spread through the parish the pitiful story of the peppermint tree. Yet now Horatio showed himself most friendly and listened with a flush of pink interest while Ferdinand dilated on his own successful efforts in furthering the interests of the Progressive Mothers.

"Just to prove my point, Mr. Merle," concluded the pompous visitor, "I will mention a great and perhaps deserved honor that the Progressive Mothers have recently extended to me in recognition of my services in their behalf."

"Horatio!" called a shrill feminine voice at this moment.

"Yes, love," answered Merle, hurrying to the library door. "It is my wife. Will you excuse me, my dear Mr.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Spooner? I am sure Mr. Fitz-Brown and the Countess will be here in a moment." And he almost ran from the room so eager was he not to hear about the honor that had been extended to Ferdinand Spooner.

Left to himself, the distinguished representative of the Progressive Mothers walked about the conservatory for some minutes, sniffing at the flowers, and finally, becoming impatient, looked out over the lawn.

"Very singular why no one comes!" he reflected; then his eyes fell on Lionel, who, at this moment, emerged from the shrubbery in a wide-brimmed straw hat and carrying a watering-pot. His trousers were mud-stained, his hands were red and roughened with toil, but his face radiated the shining brightness of one who is conscious of his own well-doing.

"One moment, please!" called Ferdinand Spooner, with an air of authority.

Lionel came forward slowly, still carrying his watering-pot. "Do you want to see me?" he asked.

"Well—er—not exactly, but—er—I am Mr. Spooner, Mr. Ferdinand Spooner, of the Progressive Mothers."

"Oh, I say, are you one of the Progressive Mothers?"

Spooner stared haughtily at this. "I am the secretary of the Progressive Mothers' Society and I desire to see Mr. Lionel Fitz-Brown. Will you give him my card, there's a good man?"

"Is it anything important?" drawled Lionel. "I don't think Mr. Fitz-Brown is up yet."

"Not up yet? Why, it's nearly one o'clock."

"I mean to say he's taking his afternoon bawth. He's very particular about his afternoon bawth, Mr. Lionel Fitz-Brown is. Can't you tell me your business?" Then, very confidentially, "I'm the gardener, you know."

## UNDER THE ROSE

---

The newcomer thought a moment. "Could you say that Mr. Ferdinand Spooner has called in regard to certain articles purchased by Mr. Fitz-Brown at the Progressive Mothers' bazaar? It's a small matter, only fourteen pounds, but—tell Mr. Fitz-Brown that we would like very much to have his check."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Lionel. "Mr. Fitz-Brown's check won't help the Progressive Mothers very much."

"Why not?"

"Because his bank account is always overdrawn."

"Dear, dear!" murmured Spooner.

"In fact, if you want my opinion," here the gardener surprised his listener by a burst of unseemly merriment, "if you really want my opinion, Mr. Lionel Fitz-Brown is—haw, haw, he's a regular piker."

At this moment the countess appeared in the conservatory door. Her skirts were pinned up, a handkerchief was tied around her head, and her eyes were dancing with mischief. At the sight of her, Lionel's merriment redoubled.

"I was just telling this gentleman," he chuckled, "that Lionel Fitz-Brown is a regular piker. Isn't he, Kate? Excuse me, this lady is—the cook, Mr. Ferdinand Spooner."

Kate courtesied demurely.

"Thank you, I don't care for the opinion of the cook," replied Spooner with dignity. "And I may add that it is most extraordinary for a gardener to speak in this way of his employer. Will you please tell Mr. Fitz-Brown that I am waiting?"

"Beg pardon, sir," put in Kate, "but I think it was the Countess Clendennin who purchased the articles from the

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Progressive Mothers. Isn't that so?" She winked at her confederate.

"You're right, it was the countess who bought the articles," agreed Lionel.

Ferdinand frowned in perplexity. "In that case, my girl, you will take a message to the countess."

"Couldn't do it, sir. The countess is having her hair dyed. Besides, you'll never get anything out of her. She never paid a bill in her life. Did she?" with another wink at Lionel.

"Not she," testified the gardener. "She uses her bills for curl papers."

"I am shocked at these statements," grieved Ferdinand Spooner, wiping his brow with a heavily scented handkerchief. "Perhaps, under the circumstances, I had better take back the articles. Ah! An idea!" He searched in his trousers pocket and produced a silver piece. "Don't mention this, but—if you can get the articles for me, quietly, you understand, I shall be glad to compensate you." He offered the coin to Lionel.

"Half a crown?" shrugged the gardener. "That's not much, is it, cook?"

"It's worth ten shillings," declared Kate.

"Very well," agreed Spooner with a pained look. "Get the articles at once."

"I'll get them," said Lionel and he disappeared into the library.

"I am astonished to hear that the Countess Clendennin dyes her hair," reflected Ferdinand.

"That's nothing," giggled Kate. "You ought to hear her swear. And she smokes like a fish."

"Dear me! This is very sad. Did you say she smokes like—a fish?"

## UNDER THE ROSE

---

---

"Like a fish," repeated the cook solemnly.

The visitor's reflections were interrupted here by the return of Lionel carrying a pink work basket, a yellow embroidered tea cosey, a green and red sofa pillow and an immense Jack Horner pie covered with white crinkly paper.

"Here are the articles," said the gardener, and he proceeded to load them, as best he could, upon the portly person of Ferdinand Spooner.

"It's fortunate I came in a carriage," puffed the latter.

"You're forgetting the rose bush," said Kate.

Spooner glanced dubiously at the rather dejected flower in its tinsel basket.

"It isn't so very wonderful, is it? Ah! An idea! Will you present this rose bush to the Countess Clendennin with the compliments of Mr. Spooner, Mr. Ferdinand Spooner. Don't forget." He moved awkwardly toward the conservatory door. "Oh, I forgot the ten shillings." He looked down helplessly at his bulky treasures. "It's rather difficult for me to—er——"

But Lionel cut him short with a patronizing wave of the hand.

"Don't bother about that, old top."

"Old top!" snorted Spooner.

By this time the countess was laughing hysterically. "Please present the ten shillings to the Progressive Mothers," she managed to say, "with the compliments of the gardener and the cook."

"The gardener and the cook!" stormed the disgusted visitor.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Lionel, as Ferdinand Spooner vanished across the lawn like a disgruntled Santa Claus.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LIONEL AND KATE

**W**HAT an appalling little bounder!" Kate's face was expressive as she fanned the air with her apron.

Lionel shut his eyes and sniffed. "I can smell his handkerchief yet."

"Don't!" she implored. "I'm trying to forget it."

Fitz-Brown turned his attention to the rose bush. The flowers hung their heads dejectedly, as if conscious of their guilty secret.

"How about the 'floral offering'?" he asked.

"I'll make you a present of it," said the countess.

"Thanks, awfully. I say, Kate," Lionel went on, "I don't mind telling you I had all I could do to keep my hands off that half crown. I give you my word if the fellow had brought out a half sovereign I should have snatched it before he knew where he was."

"Don't be too sure," laughed Kate. "I was nearer to him than you were, and I have a good long reach, too! See if I haven't."

She stretched out her arm, bare to the elbow, in bantering challenge. As they faced each other the creamy curve of her forearm lay close along his flanneled biceps, and her slender finger-tips pressed lightly against his neck. Lionel's hand, like a bronze epaulette, closed over her shoulder, and she felt the heat of his palm through

## LIONEL AND KATE

---

the thin muslin, as, with gentle strength, he held her immovable.

Ever since that unforgettable night on the golf links, over a week ago, Lionel had kept his resolution to be no obstacle to Kate Clendennin's prospects. To his idolatrous mind, Kate's ultimatum that she was going to marry Robert Baxter settled the matter. To put her altogether out of his thoughts, out of his dreams, was an impossibility, but he had kept away from her as much as possible; he had even "funked" the morning and evening handshake whenever he could. And now the curve of her warm shoulder in the hollow of his hand, the touch of her finger-tips, the white curve of her wrist so near his lips, stirring a forbidden memory with its subtle fragrance, this was more than Lionel had bargained for. It brought to bear on his resolution a pressure "beyond its guaranteed capacity." And, inasmuch as when a steam boiler explodes it is the engineer and not the boiler that is held to blame, so Lionel must not be censured for what was beyond his control.

Kate, with the supersentience of her sex, felt it coming before Lionel had the least idea of it, and as she waited second by second for the moment when her lover would press his lips passionately to her wrist, all power to draw away left her. She felt his kisses on her bare arm, up and up, and still she did not move, and when at last his lips came to hers, and for a moment he held her unresisting in his arms, Lionel had no disturbing delusion, as on a former occasion, that Kate Clendennin had fainted.

When Kate, by the exercise of that mysterious power of unreasoning possessed only by women, had made Lionel desperately ashamed of having done just what she

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

had wanted him to do, and when Lionel had sufficiently humbled himself, she lifted him to a second best heaven by allowing herself (much against her will) to be persuaded not to renounce him forever. Then, discovering that the air was stifling in the conservatory, she announced her intention of taking a walk. No! On no account would she let Lionel accompany her. He might go anywhere in the world except with her. She was going down by the lake, and she wanted to be alone.

Lionel watched her dejectedly as she crossed the lawn and disappeared through the firs. For ten minutes, fifteen minutes he waited, and then, unable to endure it any longer, and choosing to brave her displeasure rather than remain away from her another minute, Lionel followed the path Kate had taken, and found her sitting in the summer house at the end of the little rustic pier.

"I say, Kate," he plunged right in, "I can't stand this. I'll have to clear out. I thought I could go through with it a week ago, but it's too much for me. When I acted like a brute just now and—and kissed you it was because I was such a beastly ass as to think a chap like me could make you happy on nothing a year, love in a cottage and all that. But that's what I'm going to do, Kate, only without the love—just plain cottage."

"Yes?"

"The fact is," he floundered on, "I've begun to feel differently about things, about money and all that. Old Baxter's right. Work is the only thing, and—I've made up my mind I'm going to take up farming. You know that place I told you of, Kate. I can get it for next to nothing. It belongs to that uncle I told you about at Wormwood Scrubbs—the disgustingly rich one—you

## LIONEL AND KATE

---

---

know. You see I'm his favorite nephew—I mean to say his only nephew—which comes to the same thing, doesn't it? At all events he's my favorite uncle, and he's bound to leave me his money sometime, as that's the only way I could ever have enough to pay him back."

"Isn't he the aeroplane uncle?" asked Kate. Her voice sounded listless, and her eyes were fixed on the further shore of the little lake.

"That's the one. He goes in for biplanes. I had rather hoped he'd get a monoplane—not that I bear the dear old chap any ill will, don't you know." He paused and then went on more cheerfully: "But, after all, an uncle is an uncle, isn't he, Kate?"

Lionel had a way of stating great truths that carried his hearers off their feet.

"I believe he is, now that you speak of it," Kate assented. There was a slight twinkle in her eye, but she looked away before Lionel caught it, "What will you do on a farm?"

"Oh, I'm going in for vegetables, potatoes, you know, and all that sort of thing. You get the names out of a catalogue. I'm told the catalogues are free—that's one of the things that decided me—and they contain photographs of all the vegetables—regular family album, don't you know." Lionel laughed for the first time since his downfall. "All you have to do is to compare the photographs with the things, as soon as they come up, and that's how you know which is which. It sounds hard, but really it's perfectly simple when you get the hang of it."

"What if you failed to recognize a vegetable from its photograph?" questioned Kate in a serious voice. "Photographs are sometimes very flattering, you know, espe-



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

cially in catalogues. Suppose you mistook a lettuce for a cabbage?"

"Ah, there you have me. I believe it's almost impossible to tell them apart, that is, until they are ripe, but there's no use burning your bridge—I mean spoiling your cabbage until you come to it—is there, Kate? Of course," he continued, "I shall begin with potatoes. I shall feel perfectly at home with a potato."

Kate turned her head away quickly.

"Did you see that swan?" she cried. "He turned a perfect somersault in the water."

Lionel adjusted his monocle and stared at the unruffled surface of the lake. "He must have dived and come up on the other side of the island," he suggested.

"Please go on," she said. "What will be your attitude toward a—toward a—po—po——" She was afraid to trust her voice.

"A potato? My dear girl, it's the simplest thing in the world. Once plant the seeds and put the sticks in——"

"The sticks?" interrupted Kate.

Lionel permitted himself the smile of superior knowledge. "Of course, for the little beggars to climb up. I say, Kate, didn't you know that the potato is a creeper? Some of the catalogues call it a vine, but that's confusing, because a vine, don't you know, bears grapes, and a potato only bears potatoes. A chap might easily go wrong on that, mightn't he? Gardening is full of pitfalls, but so is every other profession when it comes to that, and I fancy I'll muddle through somehow, and if I don't, well, there you are!"

Lionel leaned back in the rustic seat and blew out a

## LIONEL AND KATE

---

---

triumphant cloud of smoke. Kate watched him in silence.

Presently, in response to a pair of lifted eyebrows and an outstretched palm, Lionel fumbled for his cigarette case. Kate selected one, and, poising it delicately between her lips, tipped her face toward his for a light. Lionel hastily removed his cigarette and handed it to her. She took it silently, with a look that missed its mark.

After lighting her cigarette the countess tossed Lionel's into the lake with an exclamation that caused him to look round.

"How stupid of me!" she said. "Take mine."

He was feeling for the case. Kate wondered if he had heard. She watched him with a curious expression as he took a fresh one, then as he was feeling for a match she quickly leaned her face toward his, steadying her cigarette with her slender fingers. There was no evading it this time. To complicate matters, her hand shook ever so slightly, but enough to necessitate Lionel's holding it close against his.

"Thanks, awfully," said Lionel, puffing vigorously as he withdrew from the danger zone.

Kate watched the struggling spark with a look of half-amused suspense.

"Thanks! I have it," he added, a moment later, as he leaned back and exhaled an immense cloud of smoke.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet. "I must be getting back to my 'chores,' as old Baxter calls them."

Kate remained seated. "How soon do you go?" she asked in a tone of elaborate unconcern, made perfect by the preoccupation of dusting an imaginary cigarette ash from her knee.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Go?" queried Lionel.

"To the farm?"

"Oh, yes, of course, the farm. I shall write to Uncle Cyril to-night. By Jove, won't he be surprised to hear I'm going in for farming and all that sort of thing? I'm afraid the old boy'll think I'm pulling his leg, but I'm not, Kate, upon my word, I'm in dead earnest. This working game has made another man of me. I never felt fitter in my life. I feel better every way, physically and," he hesitated, "yes, by Jove, morally." He paused breathless on this pinnacle of thought.

"And how about me?" She had turned away and was looking out over the lake, her chin resting on her hand. "I suppose you think it has made no difference to me. You don't think I'm worth making over. If I get up every morning at six and go to bed at nine, after working all day in the kitchen, it's just a joke. And as for my morals—whatever you mean by morals——"

Lionel had tried several times to get in a word, but Kate, never once taking her eyes off the lake, had kept on in a low voice, as if no one were there. It sounded to Lionel like some one talking in sleep. Now, as she paused and turned toward him, he broke in.

"Kate!" he cried. "For God's sake don't talk like that. How can you say those things? You know better. You know I don't mean that you—that you——" he stopped for want of words and went on disjointedly. "There's not another woman on earth to compare with you—physically or morally or any other way. If I thought I was such a beastly ass as not to think so I'd kick myself into that lake there and lie down. The beastly lake isn't deep enough to drown standing up in.

## LIONEL AND KATE

---

here isn't another woman like you anywhere—I don't care who she is. You're the best pal a chap ever had, and I'd back your say so on a polo pony against anyone I know." He had reached another thought pinnacle, and again he paused for breath.

Kate got up and came to him. "It's all right, Lionel. I know you didn't mean to hurt me, but I want to tell you something. It has made a difference to me—every day, just as it has to you, Lionel—and I stand for every word Cousin Hiram said—I didn't at the time, I admit." He smiled at the recollection. "A week ago yesterday I went up to my room and packed my boxes, all by myself, too. I just threw things in anyhow, higglety pigglety. You never saw such a job as I made of it." "By Jove!" exclaimed Lionel. "I did the same identical thing."

"I made up my mind," continued Kate, "I would go right out of that house and never come back."

"So did I," said Lionel; "upon my word I did. I say, Kate," he went on, "what made you change your mind?"

"The best reason in the world. I didn't know where to go."

"No more did I," admitted Lionel.

They both laughed, and the countess went on in a serious tone.

"I've learned a lot of things this last week, Lionel," she said, "and I didn't get them all out of Mrs. Bennet's Family Cookery Book. One is that the best imitation of happiness consists in——"

"Oh, come, I say," interrupted Lionel.

"In self-forgetfulness," continued Kate. "And the best receipt for forgetfulness is good, hard work."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Lionel gave her a stare of glassy bewilderment. "I may be a silly ass, I've been told so often enough by chaps who ought to know, but I'm dashed if I see what you want with imitation happiness. There's no imitation about you, Kate." He looked down. There was something he had to say and every meeting of their eyes made it harder. "Either you'll be happy or you won't be happy," he went on. "Whichever it is, it won't be an imitation. It will be the real thing and I hope—I hope——" He took a long breath, as if to pull himself together, and hurried on, still without looking at her. "It may sound a bit thick from a chap feeling the way I do, but I mean it, upon my word, I do. I hope you'll be happy, Kate, I hope to God he'll make you happy."

The countess was leaning back against the rustic doorway and her two bare arms made a glowing worshipful "V" as they flowed downward, with the gentle undulation of her body, to the slender link of her drooping hands.

On the third finger of her left hand Lionel now saw for the first time, what at first he took for a plain gold ring, but a second look discovered a widening at one side that betrayed a setting of some sort turned inward for concealment. As he looked up, Lionel knew by the quick tightening of her mouth that Kate had been smiling, yet, in her eyes, there was something very far from laughter.

"Why didn't you tell me, Kate?"

She put her hands behind her.

"Tell you what?"

"That it was all settled—your engagement, I mean."

## LIONEL AND KATE

---

---

"My engagement? But I'm not engaged—that is, I mean I haven't accepted him."

"You haven't accepted him?"

There was a tremendous knocking of Hope at the door of Lionel's heart.

"Not yet," she answered. "It is ten days since he asked me and I have given him no answer."

Lionel stared at her in blank amazement. Ten days ago! That was the day when he had met Kate on the golf course and had held her in his arms and thought she had fainted.

"That day? Kate, you don't mean it? You can't mean—do you know what day that was?"

Suddenly she caught both of his hands in hers. "Yes, of course I know, Lionel. It was there on the golf links—under the chestnut tree—in the dark—that he asked me to marry him—the man I love and—and I'm waiting to answer him here—now—this very minute! Now do you understand?"

For a moment Lionel was quite dazed. It was as if he had bumped his head against a rainbow.

"I say, Kate," he faltered, "this isn't a joke, is it? Do you know what you're saying? Are you going to be my wife?"

Kate pulled the ring off her third finger, the one and only ring she had on, and placed it on Lionel's little finger. It was a signet ring with a small engraved seal of chrysophrase.

"It belonged to my grandmother, dear! Look," she said, pointing to the pale green stone. And there, cut in minute script were the words, "*Qui me négligé, me*  
.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE THREAT

**F**OLLOWING the adventure with the rose bush in its tinsel basket, there came three days of tortured conflict for Hester Storm, conflict with red-lipped, sinister-eyed Anton, who pursued her ceaselessly; conflict also with herself, for now the imps of greed seemed to dance about her day and night, urging her to take this hidden treasure and escape with it. In the zeal of her first repentant impulse it would have been easy for the girl to give back the money to Miss Thompson and then go; she was equal to that single act of renunciation, but to stay here wearily through days of useless waiting, unable to do anything or confide in anyone, and all the time to have, burning in her breast, the knowledge of those wonderful banknotes there in the bottom of the flower-pot, all unsuspected, and hers for the easy taking—this was too much for Hester Storm.

Through sleepless night hours she sought some way of deliverance. Should she take the money and carry it to Miss Thompson in Brighton? No, no! She dared not trust herself, she dared not touch the money, not even to hide it in a securer place. The very sight of that fortune might be too strong a temptation for her; indeed, whenever her duties required her to pass through the conservatory, the troubled girl found herself hurry-

## THE THREAT

---

---

way with hands clenched and face averted from that  
oming rose bush. Once she stopped and almost  
ed; she was actually reaching toward the basket  
the words that Merle had taught her sounded  
r ears. "To be honest, to be kind. To ask God  
r day to give me strength against temptation. For  
' sake. Amen." And she staggered on out of the

banish these wicked thoughts Hester threw her-  
with feverish zeal into her household duties. She  
d the countess in the kitchen, she helped Lionel  
garden, she helped Merle in the dining room. She  
the beds, she scrubbed the floors, she welcomed  
umblest drudgery, anything to fill her mind and  
back the devils that were tempting her.

the evening of the third day she realized that the  
ion was intolerable. Not only was she doubtful  
r own strength, but she lived in growing terror of  
n, whose looks and whispered words made it all  
lear what his intentions were. Thus far she had  
ed being alone with him, but she saw that he  
d not be put off any longer.

ee here, kid," he had threatened that afternoon as  
r passed him on the drive, "if you think you can  
tag with me any longer you've got another guess  
ig. Either you come to the garage to-night after  
r, or——" The leer on his evil face was so full  
enace that she shrank away trembling.

ll come to the garage," she said.

t nine o'clock?"

e nodded slowly. "At nine o'clock."

en she hurried to her room to think. She must  
this place at once, that was certain. She could



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

hardly bear to wait another day. And as Betty Thompson was the only person to whom she could give this money, the only person she could trust—yes, that was it, as she could not go to Betty, Betty must come to her, Betty must come back from Brighton, she must come back immediately. And straightway Hester sat down and wrote the following letter:

“MY DEAR MISS THOMPSON:

“Please start for Bainbridge Manor as soon as you get this letter, which will be to-morrow morning. Take the first train and don't let anything stop you from coming. And don't tell anyone why you are coming. Say you must get some clothes or make up any excuse. I am only a poor girl, but take my word that there will be big trouble if you don't come and nobody else will do. I never gave you the right reason why I came here, but you will be glad to hear this secret and it will do a lot of good if you come at once. I'm absolutely on the level now, but I don't know if I can hold out another day, and then it will be too late.

“Respectfully yours,

“HESTER STORM.”

Having addressed this urgent summons to the Grand Hotel in Brighton, where the Baxters were stopping, Hester carefully stamped the envelope and gave it personally to the postman when he passed. Then, with a long sigh, she came down to her supper, confident that relief would be there within twenty-four hours. Alas, how many things may happen within twenty-four hours!

At nine o'clock the girl went to the garage to keep her appointment with Anton. She longed to stay away, but dared not, feeling that he was capable of some desperate act if she trifled with him further. Besides, she

## THE THREAT

---

---

had managed this man before and now she trusted to her wits to manage him again.

When Hester entered the garage she found the chauffeur bending over a table absorbed in something that seemed to require close attention. As he heard her step he rose and came forward with a sort of mock politeness that frightened her more than his usual rough aggressiveness.

"Ah, Miss Storm! It's good of you to keep your little date with me—for a change. If you'll make yourself comfortable, Miss Storm, I'll tell you a few things that may interest you."

Keenly watchful, the girl sat down. On the table before Anton were a pair of shears, a paste pot and a sheet of paper on which he had, apparently, been pasting words and letters cut from a newspaper. She noticed also a bottle of whiskey and a thick glass.

"Go on," she said quietly.

"I have been attending to my correspondence, Miss Storm," he continued in the same facetious way. "Here is something that may amuse you." He handed her an envelope on which she read, in large, black letters of uneven size, cut from a printed page, the name in all the world that she dreaded most:

### SCOTLAND YARD LONDON

"Not such a wonderful job of pasting, Miss Storm, but I guess it will get there."

With a great effort she fought back her weakness, her terror, and asked quietly. "What is it you—you want?"

"Ah!" he smiled, and his gold tooth gleamed. "You have a logical mind. You came straight to the point.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

What do I want?" He poured some whiskey into the glass and gulped it down. "What do you think I want? If you'll run your beautiful dark eyes over the letter inside that envelope you may get an idea of what I want, friend Hester."

She lifted the flap of the envelope and was about to draw forth the letter when he leaned forward and added, with a queer, twisted smile, "and please get one thing into your head, little lady: it ain't a question of what I want, but of what I'm going to have. Now read it."

With a sickening sense of helplessness Hester opened the sheet and read the following message, also made up of ill-assorted words and letters cut from a newspaper:

"SCOTLAND YARD,  
"LONDON.

"If you want a line on the party who stole five thousand pounds from the bishop of Bunchester, you can get it by sending a man to Ipping House, Ippingford, Surrey."

As the Storm girl read these words her cheeks blanched like the paper before her.

"You—you're going to send that?"

He nodded. "I'm going to send it to-night unless you deliver the goods. Mind this, it isn't a case of 'perhaps' or 'meet me to-morrow in the summer house' or any other fool fake excuse. I've had enough of that and I've waited all I'm going to. Either you deliver the goods right now or——" He pointed in grim menace to the letter.

"What goods are you talking about? What is it you want delivered?" she asked.

## THE THREAT

---

---

"My share of that money, my half. Don't say you didn't get it. I know you did. I've found out things, little Hester, since you played me for a sucker the other day."

She faced him steadily now. If she could only draw him into an argument. She didn't believe the man was born that she couldn't get the best of in a talking match.

"What have you found out? Go on, tell me."

"About Henderson, for one thing. You said you reported to him every day over the telephone."

"Well?"

"It was a lie. You never reported to Henderson. And you said there was a little man in a brown derby hat—who stuttered. Remember?"

"What of it?"

"You said he employed you to spy on me. That was another lie. There wasn't any little man."

Hester's mind worked quickly. It was likely Anton had discovered her deception, but she mustn't acknowledge it.

"I suppose they told you that at Henderson's office?" she laughed. "Of course they wouldn't spy on you. Oh, no! Say, you're easy, boy."

"It wasn't at Henderson's they told me. It was at the Ippingford telephone office. There are no records of any calls for 724 Chelsea except my calls."

The girl started to speak, but he cut her short. "Wait! If you'll let me finish you can get up a better lie. Just take a look at this—Exhibit B." He opened the table drawer and produced the false arm that Hester had hidden on the high shelf of the conservatory. "I found this where you threw it on that very busy day. Ha! Now, then, what has the dear, innocent child got to say?"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

Hester sat silent for a moment, looking him straight in the eyes; then, slowly, a smile began to play about her mouth and presently she burst into a half mischievous, half impudent laugh.

"I tried to do you up, Anton," she acknowledged, "but I didn't get away with it."

"You went through the purse while I was kissing you in the car?"

"Sure I did, but the purse was empty."

"Was, eh? We'll see if it was. And you lied about Henderson?"

She shrugged her shoulders carelessly. "Oh, I was stringing you about Henderson!"

Anton looked at her almost admiringly. "You're a wonder, kid; but—you're in awful bad with me. It don't make any difference what you say—after this. I'll believe what I see. And I'm going to have what I told you, I'm going to have the goods—right now—the goods or the girl—do you get me?"

The Storm girl sprang to her feet, eyes blazing, hands clenched.

"If you dare——" she defied him, but he waved aside her immediate alarm with a reassuring gesture.

"You can cork up the sky rockets, kid. I'm not going to touch you or—kiss you or—anything, unless you want me to."

"Want you to?" she stared at him. "Well, of all the conceited——"

"No, no," he interrupted, "I don't mean that you're stuck on me, girlie. I know how you feel, but if it's a question between going to jail and—er——" now he leered at her disgustingly, "giving me a sort of—er—half interest in your tender young beauty——"

## THE THREAT

---

---

"You beast! You coward!" she cried, her cheeks flaming.

He rose slowly and faced her with hard, narrowing eyes, but he kept his distance.

"It's that or the money," he answered, "you can take your choice."

"I tell you I haven't got the money."

"What you tell me doesn't cut any ice, kid; it's what I tell you, and that is—now listen—this is your last chance—either you give me what I want—you understand—or I walk straight out of here and put that letter in the postoffice. Now, then."

He stood before her, insolent, pitiless, holding the letter addressed to Scotland Yard.

Hester moistened her lips and began to speak in a low voice. She realized that the crisis had come. This was, perhaps, the most important moment of her life.

"I admit I've done wrong, Anton," she said. "I didn't play fair with you, but—I had a reason that——" she looked at his cruel mouth and cynical eyes and turned away in despair. "I guess you wouldn't understand the reason."

"I understand the reason, all right," he sneered; "you thought you could get away with my share of the coin and you fell down."

"No, that wasn't the reason. I meant to keep straight, Anton. When I got on that train from Paris I had cut out crooked work, I swear I had. I was going back to New York to see my sister Rosalie. She's sick and——"

"Never mind your sister Rosalie. You stole that purse." He poured out another drink of whiskey and tossed it down, while she pleaded dumbly with her beau-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

tiful dark eyes. "And you've lied to me all along." He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "You're a smooth article, Hester. You say you didn't land that money. Maybe you didn't. The chances are you did, but suppose you didn't? Then where do I come in? I get the grand laugh all around, is that it? No, no, girlie, if I don't get my half of that five thousand pounds, then, as sure as you're standing there, I get you."

"You'll never get me." She shrank away in disgust and defiance.

Anton walked slowly to the wall and took down his cap from a nail.

"Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," she flung back.

With a look of grim purpose he moved to the door, opened it and turned, holding the letter.

"Is that your last word, kid?"

For a second she hesitated, then all the strength of her nature, all the pride of her outraged young womanhood rose in fierce revolt.

"Yes," she cried. "You can post your letter; you can do what you please. You're a coward and a beast. A coward and a beast. Now, go! Go!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### ENTER GRIMES

**I**N this crisis, as in many another, the deciding influence was a pale yellow liquid poured out of a dark brown bottle—whiskey, in short—without which (several stiff drinks of it) Anton would never have posted that letter to Scotland Yard. He would have realized that such an act could only destroy his chances with Hester, while it might easily react dangerously against himself, for, after all, so far as intention went, he was as deeply involved in the crime as she was. If a detective should come to Ippingford and discover the truth it might be difficult for the chauffeur to explain how he happened to be the person who removed Miss Thompson's golf bag from the country club.

"I have done a crazy thing," he muttered as he strode away from the postoffice through the darkness, breathing deep the cool night air that calmed his passion and cleared his brain. "I have done a fool thing and it's too late to change it."

Meantime Hester, tingling with wrath after this hard encounter, had gone back to her room with a new problem that held her anxious thoughts far into the night. Had she made a mistake in defying this man? Should she have controlled her anger and somehow gained a little time? Perhaps a day would have been enough. If Miss Thompson came at once by the morning train she would be at Ipping House soon after luncheon, and



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

an hour later Hester Storm might have been free, speeding toward London and New York, with all this trouble left behind.

Whereas, now what would happen? Suppose Anton had carried out his threat and posted the letter to Scotland Yard? He was just fool enough and drunk enough to do it—perhaps. And perhaps not. It might have been all a bluff, the letter and his talk. Anyway, she was glad she had called him down. He was a beast, all right.

But suppose he had posted the letter? Suppose a detective came prowling around? Suppose it was Grimes, who had seen her in Charing Cross station that day of the robbery, and who knew all about the Storm girl's record? Then what?

In snatches of tortured sleep Hester dreamed that she was trying to escape from a room with two doors, at one of which she met the cold gray eyes of Grimes, and at the other the twisted smile of Anton. She rose soon after daybreak, unrefreshed, and, having dressed, she spent an hour packing her things, so that if the chance came she could leave at a moment's notice. Then she knelt down at her bedside and said the prayer that Merle had taught her.

A few minutes later Hester's attention was caught by sounds from below, the unbolting of heavy doors, then an echo of footsteps and low voices. She looked at her watch and saw that it was a quarter past six. Anton was opening the house. It was Friday morning. The great day, with its promise of momentous happenings, had begun. And the sun was shining.

Lightly the Storm girl descended the stairs, and pausing at the first landing, listened to the chauffeur, who was talking to a telegraph boy.

## ENTER GRIMES

---

---

"Yes, this is Mr. Baxter's house. Let me have it," he was saying.

Whereupon the boy searched in his cap and produced the familiar yellow envelope of a telegram or a cablegram.

"There!" grumbled the chauffeur as he signed the boy's book. "Here's a sixpence for you."

"Thanks, gov'nor," and the youth went off whistling, while Anton stared at the sealed message.

Hester leaned over the railing and watched her adversary, who evidently thought himself quite alone. With a few careful movements he opened the envelope and drew forth a yellow sheet.

"In cipher!" she heard him mutter. Then he moved into the library, while she, cautious and silent, followed him.

Anton went directly to Betty Thompson's desk, and, taking from his pocket a bunch of keys, he proceeded to unlock the upper left-hand drawer and drew out a small, red, leather-covered book, in which he searched eagerly, consulting the cablegram from time to time as he did so. It was Hiram Baxter's private cable code book.

With absorbed interest the chauffeur continued his work of translation, writing down the words hastily as he deciphered them. And, presently, Hester saw by his face that the cablegram must contain news of the utmost importance.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, frowning and looking about him doubtfully. He glanced at his watch, took a few steps toward the door, and listened intently, then he went quickly to the telephone.

"Hello! Give me the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, London.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

In a great hurry—please.” He spoke in a low tone and drummed nervously on the desk while he waited.

“Hello! The Ritz-Carlton? I want Mr. Henderson, room 147. Yes, Henderson. Quick, please.”

And presently, with a sort of unconscious cringing, “Hello! Is that you, Mr. Henderson? This is Anton Busch. I’m sorry to disturb you, sir, but it’s urgent. A cablegram has just come for Mr. B. It will pretty well spoil everything if he gets it. I know he’s in Brighton, sir, but Mr. Robert is here. Yes, it came in cipher. I’ve just translated it. Shall I read it, sir?”

He held before him the paper on which he had written, and was about to repeat it when the creaking of Hester’s shoe, as she leaned forward near the door, caused him to turn suspiciously. “I’ll have to be quick, Mr. Henderson. I’m in the library. Yes, I’m using the house telephone. If I’m interrupted, sir, you’ll understand. Don’t ring up. I’ll call you later. All right, sir, here’s the cablegram.”

Slowly and distinctly he read into the telephone from the sheet before him:

“HIRAM BAXTER, Ippingford, Surrey: Have advance news highest authority that Supreme Court decision copper suit will be announced to-morrow, Friday, and will be unfavorable. Prices sure to break violently as soon as decision is known. This is our one chance to save everything and close out with a profit. Ask your authority to sell fifty thousand shares Independent Copper. Vital importance to act before exchange opens this morning.

“GRAMERCY.

“Did you get that, sir?”

There was a long pause while the chauffeur listened, nodding respectfully and occasionally murmuring, “Yes,

## ENTER GRIMES

---

r." Then he answered: "I understand, sir. Five ours will do the trick. If Baxter hasn't acted by twelve it's all off." He looked at his watch. "It isn't even yet. I'll see that Mr. Robert doesn't get this cablegram until after luncheon. Good-by, sir."

With a gesture of relief he hung up the receiver, and, holding together the cablegram and the code translation, he put these carefully in his breast pocket.

Meantime Hester had been doing some quick thinking. Here was the haughty Anton caught in a piece of crooked work. He was betraying his employer, he was keeping back a message that evidently involved a fortune and that must be acted upon before twelve o'clock. There was no need of understanding Wall Street operations or Supreme Court decisions to see the importance of getting hold of this cablegram that Anton had just stuffed into his pocket. That was in her line, getting things out of people's pockets, and—perhaps this piece of yellow paper might help her play her own game. Anyhow, she was going after it.

Thus resolved, Hester flew back silently up the stairs, one flight, two flights, and, turning, came clattering down again with deliberate noisiness, as if for her first appearance, and, entering the library, greeted the chauffeur with a look of well-acted surprise.

"Oh!" she said coldly.

Anton thrust his hands deep into his pockets and stared at her, biting his mustache nervously. Then, without speaking, he moved toward her slowly, until he stood about a yard away. She faced him steadily.

"You little devil!" he said hoarsely. "I've got a notion to—to——" He began to breathe quickly through dilating nostrils, while his beady eyes burned on her.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"To what?" she challenged him.

He reached forward quickly and caught her by the arm.

"See here, now, I'm going to talk to you—straight." He drew her close to him, so close that he could feel every line of her lithe, slim figure. "You know what I said last night, kid. Well, I meant it. I'm crazy about you, and, by God, I'm going to get something out of this." He held her, struggling against him, and pressed his mouth down upon her unwilling lips.

"Wait!" she panted. "Did you—did you post that letter to Scotland Yard?"

"Why—er—no," he answered, and she knew that he was lying by the way his eyes shifted.

Once more, mad with desire, the chauffeur tried to kiss her, but with a sudden effort Hester freed herself and darted toward the door.

"I guess you've made trouble enough for one day, Mr. Anton," she laughed mockingly. "And remember, boy, if a Scotland Yard detective shows up here to-day it's you he'll take away, not me."

It was an empty threat, but she made it bravely as she tripped away, and, somehow, her words filled Anton with a vague foreboding.

"Damn that girl!" he muttered as he strode toward the garage. And presently his anger changed to black rage when, on searching his pocket for Baxter's important cablegram, he found that it was gone. Little liar! She had tricked him again. She had let him kiss her with the deliberate purpose of stealing those papers, and then she had laughed at him. Very well; he would show her. He was glad now he had notified Scotland Yard. He hoped they did send a man, and he

## ENTER GRIMES

---

swore this Storm girl should pay for what she had done. He would certainly make her pay.

Through the morning hours that followed Hester busied herself, as usual, with the housework and the kitchen work, trying to be diligent and good tempered, and putting from her resolutely the temptation to flee from this place that might soon be full of peril for her. But as noon approached she eyed the clock anxiously, and at every sound of wheels hurried to the window. There was a train from London at twenty minutes to twelve. Would Betty Thompson be on it? Would a man from Scotland Yard be on it? Would one of these two arrive before the other, and, if so, which one?

Then she wondered what would happen if a detective did come. After all, Anton's letter gave only a vague clue. No name was signed and no names were mentioned. Robert Baxter could tell nothing about the robbery, because he knew nothing. And the Reverend Merle could tell nothing for the same reason. There was only Anton to be feared, and Anton wasn't going to put himself under the cold, investigating eye of an officer of the law, not if the Storm girl sized him up right, and she thought she did. On the whole, the situation might be worse, still——

Twelve o'clock! Half past twelve! And no arrival! Perhaps Miss Thompson wasn't coming. Perhaps she didn't believe the thing was important. And straightway the imps of darkness whispered that this was fate. Hester had done her best, she had written the letter to Miss Thompson, and now, if no one would help her, if no one would take the money when she was trying to give it up—why she had better—she had better——

At this perilous moment a carriage came cruching

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

up the drive, and, glancing out, Hester recognized Betty Thompson on the back seat.

Well, that settled it. The hour had come for the testing of Hester Storm. She must go to Miss Thompson now and make her confession. She must tell this sweet young woman who had trusted her and befriended her that she was a thief, that she had stolen the bishop's purse. She had better go quickly, while she had the courage.

It was twenty minutes later when the Storm girl, white-lipped, entered the library where the secretary was arranging in a dull green vase some yellow roses that she had just picked in the conservatory. She looked up brightly and came forward with extended hand.

"Well, Hester," she smiled, "you see that I believe in you. Your letter came this morning at half-past eight, and at half-past nine I was on the train. Poor child, you look—why, you look ill?"

"Do I? Well, I—I am not feeling any too good."

"What is it? What has happened? Come over here." With kind concern Betty led her troubled friend to the davenport. "You know I'll be glad to do whatever I can to help you. Now then?"

Hester sighed wearily. "You can't help me, lady, except to—believe what I say—wish me luck when I've gone."

"You're going away?"

The girl nodded. "Just as soon as I can—this afternoon."

"Oh! I'm sorry to hear that. I take a great interest in you. I—I like you, Hester."

The genuine friendliness of her tone went straight to



“No! You mustn’t see him. Let me speak to you—alone.”





## ENTER GRIMES

---

the heart of this poor wanderer. The Storm girl fixed her dark eyes yearningly on Betty.

"I'm in trouble, lady, and—say, on the level, do you—like me?"

"Indeed I do. I liked you the first time I saw you."

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Betty, disconcerted by the girl's strange earnestness. "Oh, I liked you because you are—different and—you're pretty and—I thought it was a shame when they accused you of stealing that purse."

There was a moment's silence while Hester braced herself for the great ordeal.

"There's one thing about that purse that you don't know," she began in a low tone. But at that moment the door opened and Horatio entered, carrying a card on a tray. He wore a long, blue apron.

"A gentleman to see Mr. Robert Baxter," he said quietly.

Betty looked at Horatio in surprise. "Why, Mr. Merle! How queer you look! Are you taking Parker's place?"

Horatio bowed respectfully. "Yes, Miss Thompson, I am."

Betty laughed. It never occurred to her that Merle was speaking seriously. She picked up the card and glanced at it. "Mr. Grimes," she read, and Hester's face went white. "From Scotland Yard," she continued, studying the card. "Scotland Yard? Isn't that the place where they——"

"I think he's a detective," murmured Horatio, the brilliance of his eyes revealing his intense interest in the matter.

"A detective! Indeed! Is Mr. Robert Baxter out?"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

Horatio inclined his head gravely. "Mr. Robert Baxter is out with the car. I told Mr. Grimes and he asked to see Mr. Baxter's secretary. He says it's important."

Miss Thompson frowned impatiently. "It's most annoying. I'm engaged in a serious matter, and—— Oh! Very well! Show him in."

But now the tortured penitent broke out in an agonized cry: "No! You mustn't see him. Let me speak to you—alone."

At the sight of Hester's pallid face and entreating eyes Betty's heart softened.

"Please ask Mr. Grimes to wait," she said to Merle, as he withdrew discreetly, and then to the trembling girl: "My poor friend! You're all unstrung. Now tell me, why don't you want me to see this detective?"

"Because I—I lied to you that day—about the purse."

"Lied to me?"

"Yes, I—I did steal the purse."

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE PENITENT

**A**T Hester's startling avowal, Betty shrank away in involuntary aversion.

"Oh!" she cried, and her truthful eyes judged the girl sternly.

The culprit faced her in pleading appeal. She had played her last card recklessly, impulsively, risking everything. She never understood afterward what had impelled her to this dangerous unnecessary confession. Was it fear or calculation? She knew that if Betty betrayed her it was all up with little Hester, and she had no reason to believe that Miss Thompson would condone or tolerate an act of flagrant wickedness. Yet she had told her.

"A thief!" shivered Betty.

"Yes, a thief," flung out the other, in half defiance. "You don't think I'm good enough to touch, do ye? Maybe I'm not, but—say, do you want to know what made me steal—the first time? Do you want to know?" The words tumbled out in a fierce tumult, and Betty, fascinated, watched this strange girl as her dark eyes blazed and her nostrils quivered.

"Tell me," said Betty gently, "sit here—tell me everything." And, leading the way to the davenport, she placed Hester beside her. "Now!"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"I was only a kid—about twelve," panted the penitent. "We lived on Orchard street."

"New York?"

"Yes. In a rotten tenement and—my sister Rosalie she was seventeen—she took care of us, me and my little brother."

"Wait!" interposed Betty. "Is this true? You mustn't try to work on my feelings. You must tell the truth. You know you haven't—Hester—at other times."

The Storm girl sat biting her red lips and twisting her fingers nervously. "I've been crooked," she said, speaking low, "but, lady, I hope God will strike me dead if——"

"Hush! Don't say that."

"I do say it. I mean it. I want you to believe it. Nobody's ever believed me or—been kind to me—except you and——" she was sobbing now, "if you're going back on me—I don't care—for anything." She sprang up suddenly with a fierce gesture, and pointed to the door. "Go on! Call in Grimes! Give me up!"

"I don't want to give you up," soothed Betty; "but I must do what is right. Sit down! Tell me the truth. What about Rosalie?"

At the mention of her sister, Hester's face softened.

"Say, she was the finest girl, the prettiest girl, I ever saw. That's why I liked you, because you—honored you did—you made me think of Rosalie."

"Yes?"

"But she wasn't strong. She worked thirteen hours a day at a sewing machine, a damned heavy thing that would break your back and—she never went to the country—she never had a pretty dress."

## THE PENITENT

---

"What a wicked shame!"

"Every cent she made she spent on us. Then she got sick and—she coughed a lot and—she couldn't work the machine. There she'd lie on the bed, in a little back room, with her face all flushed and I'd hear her say, 'Please, God, take care of Hester and Jamie, and let me see the green fields—just once.' Say, lady, what would you have done, if you'd been me?"

"I—I don't know," murmured Betty, wiping her eyes.

"S'pose ye didn't have a dollar in the world?" pursued Hester eagerly, "and the agent came for the rent, a red-faced devil with a big diamond pin, and s'pose he tried to kiss ye and ye knew that pin might save Rosalie, say, would ye have pinched the pin?"

"You mustn't ask a—question like that," replied the other, trying vainly to keep back her tears.

"Yer cryin'! Then—then ye don't despise me?"

"I'm sorry for you, so sorry, but—Hester, you must make amends for what you've done, you must give back the purse."

"I will."

"Where is it?"

"You'll stand by me? You won't let them take me?"

"I'll do the best I can for you. Where is it?"

"You won't tell Grimes that you were in the railway carriage?"

"I must tell him, if he asks me. I can't remain in a false position."

Hester's eyes filled with tears. "Then that settles me. He'll get the truth out of you; he'll twist you around his fingers. My God! They'll send me away for ten years!"

"Be quiet. Let me think."

Distressed and perplexed, Miss Thompson walked back

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

and forth trying to decide what she should do. And Hester in wide-eyed supplication watched her, knowing well that her fate was trembling in the balance. If she could only think of something—something that would influence this fine, high-toned girl, whose soul could not be reached by any base appeal, she realized that.

At this moment there sounded beyond the conservatory the sharp call of a whistle, low and sinister.

"What's that?" started Betty.

Hester listened in tense alarm. "It's Grimes. He's got a man outside. Say," she quivered, "what are ye goin' to do with me?"

"What can I do?"

"Hide me somewhere until Grimes has gone. Will ye?" she begged.

As Miss Thompson studied the wretched girl she felt like an avenging angel who, without quite understanding how, had been changing into a benevolent fairy. Here, cowering before her, was a fugitive from justice who should, no doubt, be given up, but somehow, Betty could not do it.

"Hester," she said. "I'm doing wrong, but I can't help believing there is good in you and—I can't send you to prison. You can stay in my little room—there!" She pointed to the mezzanine door.

"Oh, lady, ye'll do that for me?" Hester seized Betty's two hands and pressed them to her lips.

"Wait! It's understood that you give back the money—the stolen money."

"Sure! I'll tell ye where it is and you can give it back yourself."

"I'll give it to the bishop. He's on his way here now."

"The bishop? He don't know I'm here?"

## THE PENITENT

---

"He knows nothing. I'll tell him that—I'll say that the person who took the money is sorry and—I'll save you somehow."

"You give me your promise—your promise true?"

"I give you my promise—true," repeated Betty firmly. "Where is it—the money?"

Now, briefly and humbly, Hester told the truth about the bishop's purse, acknowledging her own wrongdoing, and tracing the treasure from her capture of it on the train up to the moment of its hiding under the rose bush.

"I see," said Betty. "You dropped the purse in my golf bag when they came to search you on the train?"

"Yes," confessed the other.

"And—and—oh, it's all clear! It was to get the money out of my golf bag that you came here. Was it?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"And now this five thousand pounds is there in the conservatory—hidden in a flower pot?"

"Yes. You'll find it there. I wouldn't touch it. I hate it. But, lady," she pleaded, "don't take the money out until Grimes has gone. He's watching everywhere, and—he's liable to see you and—that would queer me. Promise ye won't take the money until Grimes has gone?"

This seemed reasonable. "Very well, I won't take the money until Grimes has gone," agreed Miss Thompson. "Now come! I'll show you the way."

Betty started for the winding stair, but Hester caught her arm with an eager movement.

"See here!" she said and her eyes were warm with gratitude. "You've been good to me and—I know some-



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

thing that'll make a lot of difference to Mr. Baxter. A cablegram came for him this morning."

"A cablegram?"

"Yes. And if he don't get it before twelve o'clock, it's all up with him."

"Before twelve o'clock? How do you know that?"

"I stood at that door while Anton was on the phone talking to a man named Henderson."

"Mr. Baxter's enemy!"

"That's what. Anton's a crook in Henderson's pay. He got this cablegram and held it back. If you don't believe me"—swiftly she drew the paper from her dress—"there!"

"Heavens! When did this come?"

Hester studied the yellow form. "Must have left New York at ten o'clock last night. See? Must have got here before anybody was up—except Anton."

"The scoundrel!" Betty hurried to her desk and rapidly deciphered the message. "This is terrible! There isn't a moment to lose. If something isn't done before twelve o'clock, Mr. Baxter will be ruined. I must think. Come to my room."

A moment later the two women disappeared into Betty's chamber, and, scarcely had the door closed softly after them, when Grimes entered. He had a round, red face, a stubby, reddish mustache, and small, peering eyes. He wore a checked suit and was smoking a large black cigar. Altogether he looked the typical American detective familiar in farce; but Grimes was not a farcical person; on the contrary, he was one of the most formidable men connected with Scotland Yard, a silent man, and it was considered bad business for the criminal who had Grimes on his track.

## THE PENITENT

---

The detective glanced carelessly about the big room, moved here and there, picked up the red-covered code book that Betty had left on her desk and was frowning at its mysteries when Betty herself appeared on the landing above the winding stair.

"I beg your pardon," she said with challenging directness. "May I ask what you are doing there?"

"I was going to ask you the same question," answered Grimes quietly. "What are you doing—there?"

"I'm attending to my duties as Mr. Baxter's secretary," she said coming down the stair and trying not to seem ruffled.

"I see. That's an interesting little door." He pointed to the mezzanine chamber.

"Yes. Are you an architect?"

"No. I'm an officer from Scotland Yard—Mr. Grimes. Just looking around a little while I wait for Mr. Baxter. Don't let me disturb you."

He strolled off toward the conservatory, but turned at one of the French windows. "Oh! May I ask your name?"

Betty glanced up from the code book which she was consulting in nervous haste.

"I told you I am Mr. Baxter's secretary."

"Yes, but—your name?"

The girl drew herself up to her full height and, looking the man straight in the eyes, said simply, "Miss Thompson. Really, Mr. Grimes, you must excuse me now."

The detective gave her a keen glance that seemed to take in every detail of her face and person. "Certainly," he said, then, bowing politely, "I'll see you later, Miss Thompson."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### LIONEL TO THE RESCUE

**W**ITHOUT losing an instant Betty flew to the telephone.

"Hello! Hello!" she called impatiently, but there was no response. She worked the lever, shook the receiver, tapped her foot, and winked her long eyelashes rapidly, all to no avail. The instrument seemed dead, there was no familiar buzzing of the wires and it presently occurred to her that this was no ordinary delay of a heedless operator; there was something wrong with the telephone itself.

"Oh, dear!" she cried. "What shall I do?" And, hurrying to the conservatory window, she looked out despairingly among the palms and lilies. Then her face lighted as she saw Lionel coming slowly across the lawn. In one hand he carried his inevitable watering pot and in the other he held an open book that he seemed to be studying.

"Mr. Fitz-Brown! Come here—please—quick," she called.

"Right-o!" answered the amateur gardener and blissful lover, and leaving his watering pot, but clinging to his book, Lionel presently joined the young lady in the library.

"I say, I'm awfully pleased you called me," he beamed.

## LIONEL TO THE RESCUE

---

"I know you're an awfully intelligent girl, Miss Thompson, and all that sort of thing and—do you happen to know anything about—er—bugs?"

"Bugs?" gasped Betty.

"Isn't that what you Americans call them? We call little beggars beetles. This is an American book, 'The Compendium of Familiar Bugs.' Rather good, isn't it? They are familiar. Er, what?"

"Please, Mr. Fitz-Brown," she protested, but there was no stopping him.

"Potato bugs and spinach bugs and cauliflower bugs," he rattled on. "I say, do you know how to tell a spinach bug, Miss Thompson?"

"No, but——"

"Oh, I was sure you wouldn't," continued the devoted agriculturist. "Spinach bugs have red backs and long whiskers. Say it over to yourself—red backs and long whiskers."

"Oh, dear Mr. Fitz-Brown, I really can't——"

"Oh, yes, you can," insisted Lionel. "It's perfectly simple except cauliflower bugs. Let me see! Cauliflower bug——" he paused to consult the book.

"You must put the book away and help me. I've got to send a cablegram. There isn't a minute to lose."

The gardener's face clouded with visions of charges at the end of a word. "A cablegram! By Jove! I'll see, I'll see——" he began to search through his pockets.

"Isn't that," said Betty. "I have the money. It's not so far from it there in time. The cable office is a mile away and we've only twenty minutes. I tried to telephone it, but the thing doesn't work. I'm afraid Anton has tampered with the wires."

"Oh, I say!"

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"And, knowing what I do of Anton, I daren't send him with the car. Oh, it's maddening!"

"I can drive a car, Miss Thompson, if that's all you want."

"Really? Oh, splendid! Just a second while I write the cablegram."

She started for the desk, but stopped midway with a look of despair.

"It's no use! I had forgotten. Mr. Robert Baxter is out with the car; there's nothing to be done." She sank hopelessly into a chair.

Lionel Fitz-Brown stroked his mustache, adjusted his eyeglass and then, with a flutter of the ancestral spirit, rose to the situation.

"But, my dear Miss Thompson," he drawled, "if we have twenty minutes, I don't mind telling you that I can do my mile in ten."

Betty sprang to her feet. "You can?"

The gardener screwed up his eyeglass and nodded. "Sprinting is one of the things I do rather well."

"Then sprint—for your life," cried the girl excitedly. "If you get this message off before twelve o'clock—wait—where are those cable forms? Ah, here!"

And, snatching up one of the yellow blanks, she began to write with feverish haste. "Pontifex, New York. Can you read that?"

"Pontifex? I say, it sounds like a potato bug," chuckled Lionel, peering over her shoulder.

"That's the cable address. Now, the rest of it—no time to put it into the code."

Then she wrote rapidly: "Authorize you to sell for my account 50,000 shares Independent Copper. Act immediately. Gramercy."

## LIONEL TO THE RESCUE

---

---

"Gramercy?" questioned Fitz-Brown.

"That's Mr. Baxter's code signature. Here! And here's the money." She handed him the cablegram and some gold pieces, then anxiously looked at her watch. "Sixteen minutes. Can you make it?"

"Four to one I can make it, but, Miss Thompson, don't you think we ought to—er—I know you're a deucedly clever girl and all that sort of thing, but I really think——"

"Don't think! Run as you never ran before."

"Right-o! I'm going. Now watch me," and, dropping his precious book on bugs, Lionel Fitz-Brown darted out through the conservatory and a moment later this amiable descendant of the crusaders might have been seen, in gardener's costume, his eyeglass firmly in place, rushing madly along the dusty highway in a manner that would certainly have astonished his exquisite friends in Mayfair.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE STORM

**L**ONG after the luncheon gong had sounded Betty Thompson sat at her desk in the library, too agitated to think of eating, too anxious about the outcome of things to take her mind off the tense situation. Whichever way she turned perplexities confronted her. There in the conservatory was the stolen money, but she had promised not to touch it until this wretched detective had gone. When would he go? And there in her little chamber was this unfortunate girl, Hester Storm, whom she must save somehow, but how? And, wandering about the village of Ippingford—what could be keeping him?—was Lionel Fitz-Brown, bearer of that desperate cable message that might save Hiram Baxter or—or it might ruin him. Oh, dear, why didn't Lionel come back?

When Horatio entered presently with some food on a tray, a little cold meat and a salad, Betty shook her head sadly. She had no appetite, she really could not eat.

"You seem troubled, my dear," said Merle with kindly concern. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, thank you," she answered wearily.

The clergyman put down the tray, looked about him cautiously, and then, tiptoeing close to Betty, he whispered: "Miss Thompson—that man—the detective?"

## THE STORM

---

"Yes?"

Horatio lifted his chin wisely, and, with a tragic thumb, pointed to the library door.

"He's still waiting. He seems to be everywhere at once. In the words of King Solomon, he lieth in wait at every corner. I wish he would go away."

"I wish he would," she sighed.

"He acts as if he thought we were sheltering a fugitive in this house."

Betty started. "Is that such a dreadful thing to—shelter a fugitive?"

"My dear," said the curate earnestly, "I am speaking of a fugitive from justice, a malefactor, and to shelter such a person is tantamount to becoming a partner in his crime. It is a grave offense in the eyes of the law; it means imprisonment; it means——"

"Mr. Merle," interrupted the girl indignantly, "do you mean to tell me that if a repentant sinner came to you for help and protection you, as a Christian, would refuse to shelter him?"

Horatio stroked his side whiskers and opened and closed his mouth several times with clerical deliberation.

"This is one of those delicate questions, Miss Thompson; one of those delicate questions that—that——"

But Betty would not be put aside with pompous generalities.

"Mr. Merle," she asked earnestly, "suppose you had made a promise to shield some one, to save her from a terrible disgrace?"

"Some one who had done wrong?"

"Yes, she has done wrong, but—she is sorry for it—she has made amends."



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"Then, my dear, your duty is plain. If she truly repents of her sin, and if you have given your promise——"

"But suppose keeping my promise to save this person—suppose it means—telling a lie?"

"Ah," replied the clergyman, solemnly lifting two scandalized palms, "it is my duty to forbid you, my child, under any circumstances to tell an untruth—even to save another from destruction."

As he uttered these words he blinked uneasily behind his powerful glasses, and immediately added with nervous haste: "I say that as a minister of the church, but—er—as a man——"

"Yes? As a man?" she questioned eagerly.

It is impossible to know how Horatio would have extricated himself from this dilemma, for, just as he was searching for some theological barrier against the girl's persistence, the telephone rang sharply.

Betty took up the receiver. "Yes?" she answered, while the curate wiped his brow and observed this fair American with wondering interest. What a country America must be, he reflected, if so charming and clever a young lady was a specimen of its secretaries! What must its leisure class be? Then he remembered that Hiram Baxter had once assured him that plumbers and gasfitters were the only leisure class in America. He had asked Harriet to make a note of the fact. Extraordinary, this American aristocracy of plumbers and gasfitters!

The secretary, meantime, was listening, with brightening eyes and a flush of pleasure, to the telephone message.

"Don't you know who it is?" she smiled. "Miss

## THE STORM

---

---

Thompson. Yes, I was in Brighton, but I came up here this morning for—for some things.”

Then there was a pause of listening, while the girl's face took on a startled expression. “The Bishop of Bunchester? Oh! I see. Very well, I'll tell Mr. Merle.” And she hung up the instrument.

“It was Mr. Robert Baxter,” she explained to Merle. “He is on his way here in the motor with a friend of yours.”

“A friend of mine?”

“I suppose he's a friend of yours—the Bishop of Bunchester.”

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the curate. “The Bishop of Bunchester!” He took off his glasses and rubbed them nervously.

“They will be here shortly and Mr. Robert wanted me to ask you,” her eyes twinkled mischievously, “I don't understand what you have to do with it, Mr. Merle, perhaps he meant Mrs. Merle, but he asked if you would please see about one of the guest rooms.”

“Quite right, my child,” answered the clergyman gravely. “I will take great pleasure in arranging everything for his lordship. You see, I am—I am one of the servants in the house.”

With a sort of humble dignity Horatio took up the tray while Betty stared at him in puzzled interest.

“Oh, Mr. Merle!” she said. “If you don't mind leaving that tray, perhaps I might eat a little—later.”

“Certainly. I'll leave it here. By the way, my dear,” he paused at the door, “the difficult question—that was troubling you?”

“Yes?”

“Why don't you put it to the bishop?”

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Perhaps I will," said Betty, and, long after the curate had gone, she sat still at her desk, thinking. Nor could all her worries and perplexities silence the glad thought that very soon she would see the man whose voice had just thrilled her over the telephone, the man who, without knowing it, had made her suffer, and who now, without knowing it, had made her happy.

Following a sudden joyous impulse, Betty took a key from her bag and, opening the top drawer of her desk, drew out, with loving touch, a small book beautifully bound in dark green leather. It was a little volume of the thoughts of Marcus Aurelius. And her eyes fell upon one of her favorite marked passages :

"It is in thy power, whenever thou shalt choose, to retire into thyself. For nowhere, either with more quiet or freedom from trouble, does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that, by looking into them, he is immediately in perfect tranquillity; and I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than the good ordering of the mind."

She pondered these comforting words, then, shyly, with a little gasp of pleasure, turned back to the flexible cover, where a flap of silk formed a thin pocket for some few sacred things, a picture of her mother, a faded and flat-pressed flower and four-leaf clover that once had been important, and, with these, the typewritten letter that Bob Baxter had dictated to her in this very room, the letter beginning "My dearest Betty" that she had shamefacedly saved from rumpled oblivion in the scrap basket, and ever since had treasured among her precious possessions.

Once again Betty read over this wonderful epistle, and she recalled all the nice loyal things Bob Baxter had

## THE STORM

---

at day about his little pal of olden times. Did n them then? Had he forgotten them now? She

He couldn't have meant them very much and ying on as he was with Kate Clendennin. Poor al of olden times!

now a singular thing happened. As Betty looked at the typewritten words she suddenly had an ortable feeling that some one had entered the nd was looking at her. There had been neither nor word, but she knew that a person was stand-re. And, glancing up, she saw Hester Storm at f-open door of the mezzanine chamber, her dark ced on her benefactress in silent supplication.

!" cried Betty, in quick self-reproach.

er touched a warning finger to her lips and dis-ed into the chamber. Whereupon Miss Thomp-reading some new development, moved swiftly the little stair. On the way she stopped, in an e of kindness, and took up the tray of food.

r girl! She's had nothing to eat," she thought, moment later, she joined Hester in the bedroom.

it came about that when Robert Baxter, in bril-olor and fine spirit, burst into the library a few s later, eager to see Betty Thompson, he found room empty. But there on the davenport were of a recent feminine occupation, suede gloves, a traveling hat and veil, and a lizard skin bag with monogram. Betty was evidently somewhere about, e young fellow settled himself down to wait. He alk to Betty, he must explain that he hadn't meant her feelings the other day at Brighton. He was iving a joke with her—why, he wouldn't hurt her s for the world.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

As the young man glanced about the library his eyes fell on the little volume of Marcus Aurelius, and, taking it up carelessly, he came upon the letter shut within its pages. He had no thought of prying, indeed, he had no idea to whom the book belonged, and, before he realized what he was doing, he had read his own letter.

"By the Lord Harry!" he muttered, and the hot blood rushed to his face as he understood what this meant. That dear girl! His Betty! To think that she had kept that letter! He remembered seeing her crumple it up and throw it in the waste basket. She must have stooped down and picked it out again—and smoothed it—and folded it—and kept it. His plucky little pal! His Betty!

Bob rose and strode unhappily about the room. What a fool he had been not to recognize Betty! Couldn't he have seen that she was no ordinary secretary? My God! A child would have understood. And the worst of it was he had liked her all the time, he had looked at her and wondered about her, and—and then he had gone and made a silly idiot of himself with Kate Clendennin. It was sickening.

Bob had just brought himself to this state of righteous penitence and self-abasement when the door from Betty's chamber opened, and Betty herself appeared. She was stronger and happier now from having cheered and strengthened a disheartened sister woman. She was resolved to give Hester Storm this one last chance that she begged for to make good. She would try to save the girl from prison. She would hide her for a few hours, until Grimes had gone. This much she had promised sacredly to the pleading penitent, and she would keep her word.

## THE STORM

---

At the sight of Betty, Bob went toward her eagerly, holding out his hands.

"Betty! Betty!" was all he could say.

"There!" she said, smiling happily and giving him her hand. "It's all right, Bob; it's all right."

"No, no, it's all wrong," he insisted.

She loved his nice naughty child penitence. Nor did she object to his masterful way as he drew up chairs.

"I've a lot to tell you," he went on, "but——"

Her dimple deepened at his embarrassment, and she reflected that he certainly needed a woman to help him pick out his cravats.

"I'm listening," she said demurely.

"This is the first chance I've had to speak to you since that day at Brighton—when you——"

"I'm sorry I—I lost my temper, Bob," she whispered.

"Sorry," he burst out. "Why should you be sorry? You did the right thing. You called me down, but—you didn't say enough—not half enough."

"I didn't?"

He caught the mischief of her eyes, and, suddenly, as they remembered Betty's slashing outburst, they both were seized with a wild desire to laugh.

"My little pal! Betty Thompson!" he exclaimed in the old cordial way. "Say, why didn't you tell me about this—secretary business?" He tried to take one of her hands in his, but she drew it away gently. "Why didn't you, Betty?"

"I—I didn't want to," she answered in a low tone.

"That's no answer. I don't see why you did it."

"You don't? Bob, you must see why I wanted to help Guardy when he's been so good to me, and—he had no secretary, and—I've been so extravagant. Think of

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

all the money Guardy has given me, and I—I supposed it was mine, I thought it was money father left me, but—he really left nothing. He—he left nothing.”

“Nothing? He left the finest, pluckiest girl in the world. And, anyway, I don’t see why you had to hide your name. Why didn’t you say you were Betty Thompson and not just any old Miss Thompson? I mean any young Miss Thompson,” he added, laughing.

She hesitated before answering.

“Bob, you may not believe me, you think musicians are crazy people—yes, you do, you said so, but—I’ve worked hard at my singing, and—I have a voice, a fine voice. I’ve sung in concerts, and—I’m going to make a name for myself, not like Melba or Emma Eames, but—well, you’ll hear of Elizabeth Thompson some day, and it won’t be as a secretary pounding on a typewriter, either; it will be as a singer. So there!” She drew herself up with a flash of the eye and a lift of the chin that made Bob thrill as he watched her. “Now you see why I’m just plain Miss Thompson.”

“Betty, you know you’ve been talking nonsense; you know you’ve not given me the right reason.”

Betty dropped her eyes in confusion. “If there was another reason it was a—foolish reason, and——” suddenly she drew back, and, with a start of remembrance, changed the subject. “How stupid! We’re forgetting the bishop.”

“Hang the bishop! He’s lying down. He says we’re going to have a storm—says he aches all over—that’s how he knows.”

“How interesting! I believe we are going to have a storm. Look, Bob.” She pointed to a line of heavy clouds advancing formidably in purple black masses.

## THE STORM

---

---

He shook his head. "I don't want to talk about the storm, Betty, or about the bishop or about any other old thing. I want to talk about you. Tell me about that foolish reason. I love foolish reasons."

"Well, I—I thought it would be—amusing to—see if—you would know me." She doled the words out teasingly, then, with a laugh of half triumph, half reproach: "And you didn't, you didn't!"

"How do you know I didn't? I knew you all right the other day at Brighton."

"Yes, but your mother told you. Oh, you needn't look so innocent. I'm sure she did. Why, you didn't even remember the little keepsake you gave me."

"What keepsake?"

"Ah! I told you! And I've kept it all these years."

She opened her lizard skin bag and produced a silver pencil with a whistle at the end.

"There! I suppose you've even forgotten the whistle." She blew shrilly on the little plaything.

Bob looked at her out of straightforward loyal eyes. "I own up, Betty, I had forgotten. I didn't know you until Mother gave the thing away, but I'll say this, you made me think of Betty. I never knew how it was, but—now I know." He leaned toward her eagerly. "There's only one Betty in the world; there couldn't be two and—"

"It really is going to storm, Bob," she said, rising nervously. "Just hear that wind. And see how dark it's getting."

She felt caressing shivers running up and down her back as she caught the unsteadiness of his voice.

"Sit down, Bob. I'm going to sing for you. I'm going to sing my favorite song."



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

He tossed his big shoulders impatiently, and she flung him a pouting reproof.

"Oh, well, if you don't care to hear my favorite song."

"I do care, Betty. I'm crazy to hear it, but—hello!" He paused as a pompous cough and ponderous tread resounded through the hall.

"It's the bishop," said Betty, and the words were scarcely spoken when his lordship entered, his benignant smile relieving the formidable impressiveness of his ecclesiastical coat and buckled knee breeches.

"Ah, my young friends," was his sonorous greeting as he peered among the shadowed spaces of the great room. "Ah, here you are! Quite a charming twilight picture!" He took their hands in a hearty grasp, then, turning slyly to Bob, "I don't think I need apologize for keeping you waiting."

Young Baxter gave a little self-conscious laugh, but Betty immediately became dignified.

"We were talking about—about music."

"Yes," added Bob. "You know Betty has been studying singing in Paris—she has a splendid voice."

"I should very much enjoy hearing Miss Thompson sing." The bishop bowed gallantly.

"You're just in time. Miss Thompson has promised to sing her favorite song, and—er—I was saying it would be rather nice to have it in the dark with—er—the organ accompaniment."

Betty opened her eyes at the glibness of Bob's invention.

"To be sure," approved his lordship. "In the dark, by all means, with the storm raging outside. Bless my soul! Look at that rain!"

The water was coming down in sheets and torrents,

## THE STORM

---

lashing the library windows and seething over the glass roof of the conservatory.

"It sounds like a Belasco melodrama," laughed Bob.

"Yes, yes, quite so," murmured the bishop, not understanding in the least this allusion. "And what is your favorite song, my dear?" he asked Betty.

"Oh, I would never have the courage to sing before you," she declared.

"Besides, it's so much more interesting to talk. We'll have some lights and some tea, and—you must tell us what brings you to this part of the world?"

"Why, don't you know? Didn't you tell her?" The churchman turned to Bob in surprise.

"I—er—I thought I did," stammered the latter, but Betty shook her head.

"It's quite a mystery, my dear," the prelate explained. "It's in connection with that unfortunate affair in the train—you remember?"

"The purse?"

"Exactly. I received a telegram this morning from Scotland Yard—the police headquarters."

"Yes?"

"Perhaps you don't know it, but they have sent a detective here, a man named Grimes."

Betty could feel her lips getting white, but she kept her self-possession.

"I know," she said quietly, "I saw him."

"I had a few words with him myself just now. He seems like a straightforward fellow—says he has a clew, but—he isn't quite ready to make his report."

"How can he have a clew in this house?" objected Bob. "The servants have all left, and—I guess it's a false alarm."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"I'm afraid so," sighed the prelate. "We have had so many false alarms. You remember those German musicians, Miss Thompson?"

"I remember."

"They were innocent, it appears, quite innocent. Ah, well, I suppose we must be patient," the prelate continued in a tone of resignation, "and, for the moment, my dear, nothing could be more delightful than the song you were speaking of—in the dark, please."

Betty looked out into the park, where the swaying pines, tortured in the strength of the tempest, were hurling their branches to and fro like huge black hands. She listened to the shrieking of the gale as it rose and fell, then, without speaking, she went to the old organ, and, seating herself at its yellow keyboard, in the paneled recess, began to play softly a tender prelude of minor chords. As her courage grew she swelled into a braver ascending movement with danger notes sounding here and there, and, finally, improvising through a rapid procession of major chords, she swung into a triumphant crashing finale with the full strength of the organ, a storm within and a storm without that stirred old Bunchester to the depths of his tired soul and gave Betty Thompson new courage for the task that was before her.

Suddenly she stopped. There was a moment of tense silence, then her sweet voice lifted in an inspired melody, and, with all the tenderness of her nature, she sang "Annie Laurie."

"Wonderful! Admirable!" exclaimed the bishop when the last note of the haunting words had died away. "You have an exquisite voice, my dear. Really, I—I don't know when I have been more genuinely touched."

## THE STORM

---

Betty herself was so deeply moved that she could scarcely trust herself to speak.

"Bob," she called softly, "will you get my handkerchief? It's there by you—in my desk—the top drawer."

She spoke as if she thought Bob was sitting near her desk, but he rose from the opposite corner of the room.

"Certainly," he said, crossing over. "Wait, I'll turn up the lights," and he did so, touching a button in the wall.

As the electrics flashed out Betty looked about her in surprise.

"Why, how strange!" she cried.

"What?" asked the bishop.

"Surely you—you haven't been sitting there all the time—while I was singing?"

"My dear young lady, I haven't moved from this chair," declared his lordship.

"But you must have moved. Some one moved across this room," she insisted. Then she turned earnestly to Baxter.

"Bob, was it you? Did you move? I couldn't see in the dark, but—I thought it was you."

Her voice was almost pleading now.

"Nobody moved," Bob assured her. "We were too much taken up with your singing. Say, Betty, it was great. I never heard anything like it, never. I knew you could sing, but—by George, I didn't know you were an artist."

The girl's eyes were still troubled.

"You'll think me silly," she said with a strange impressiveness, "but—I know some one passed through this room while I was singing."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### "HER PROMISE TRUE"

**H**ALF an hour before this, in the little mezzanine chamber, Hester Storm, with a sigh of relief, had sat down to the tray of food that Betty had left for her. At any rate, the worst was over. She had confessed her sin and had renounced all interest in the stolen money except to give it back. Miss Thompson would intercede for her with the bishop, and he, having the funds once more, would see that the police investigation was dropped. So she need not worry about Grimes. He would be taken off the case within twenty-four hours and—— What was that?

Above the tumult of the storm she had heard distinctly the click of a latch and, glancing up from her place, Hester fixed her eyes on the green door at the other end of the room and, presently she saw this open slowly and noiselessly, as she had seen it open once before. A moment later Anton entered, his eyes cruel, his face set with wicked determination.

The chauffeur closed the door behind him and locked it. Then, without a word, he went to the other door that opened on the library stairs and, putting this an inch or two ajar, he stood listening. Hester listened also and could hear Bob Baxter speaking tenderly to Betty.

"Spooning!" nodded the intruder. "Good business! He'll keep her for a while, but——" he turned the key in the lock, "I'll make sure just the same."

## "HER PROMISE TRUE"

---

---

Hester started to her feet.

"Why do you lock that door?" Her bent shoulders and staring eyes betrayed her sudden terror.

"You'll find out," he whispered hoarsely.

She cowered away as the man strode toward her.

"Worked your little game all right this morning, eh, kid?" he sneered. "Got the cablegram out of my pocket?"

She half shut her eyes, watching him keenly.

"Yes, I got it."

"What'd'ye do with it?" he demanded.

She tossed her head with a flash of impudence.

"That's my business. See here, you keep your hands off me or——"

"Or what?"

With a scowl of anger he caught her in his powerful arms, and held her helpless. "Little fool! I had you this morning—in the library and I—let you go." His voice was thick with passion. "But if you get away now—— Good Lord, hear that!"

He turned to the window as the shrieking tempest made the whole house tremble.

Like a desperate hunted thing Hester drew back stealthily. It was in her mind to make a dash for one of the doors and escape before Anton could seize her again. He had left the keys in the locks and—the room was almost dark, but——

The chauffeur turned as if anticipating her thoughts.

"Come here," he ordered and slowly she obeyed. "Why should I keep my hands off you?"

She stood white-faced before him, searching vainly for some way of escape.

"You're a crook—wanted by the police. There's a

man in this house from Scotland Yard. Did you know that?"

"Yes, I know it."

Anton caught her by the wrist and drew her to him roughly.

"You're hurting me," she cried.

"He'll hurt you more than that, if he gets you—he'll hurt you with irons."

The chauffeur leaned closer, leering horribly and it seemed to Hester that all the strength was going out of her body.

"Let me go!" she panted.

"Ha! Let you go!"

Again he caught her in his arms and pressed her fiercely against him. She felt his hot breath. She saw the veins swelling in his red neck. She struggled and turned her head from side to side, but he buried his face in her neck, in her hair, with little snorts and cries like an animal; then he kissed her furiously on the cheeks, on the forehead and at last full and long on the mouth.

"Ha! Let you go!" he breathed with smothered violence. "I'll let you go when—stop that!" he cried. "You will! You'll bite me?"

With a twinge of pain he drew back for a second, but instantly rushed after her as she sprang away.

And now, in her extreme and imminent peril, Hester took the last chance that remained. Before the madman could get his hands on her again, she screamed with all the power of her lungs—then screamed again.

Anton stood still, his eyes filled with sudden fear, his nostrils dilated. That wild cry had stirred the coward within the beast. And, while he waited, stunned and stupid, Hester's quick wits took control of the situation.

## "HER PROMISE TRUE"

---

"Listen! I hear a step," she warned him, but, in her sinking heart, she knew that there was no step. No one had heard her. The shrieking of the storm had covered everything. She was as helpless as before.

And while Anton listened in alarm, not yet realizing his advantage, the Storm girl's mind leaped forward to study the next move in the desperate game she was playing. In a moment he would see that there was no danger—no one was coming, no one would come. And then, in gloating reaction, he would come back to his infernal purpose and—God! she must turn him from that before the beast was roused again.

"Anton," she said with swift decision, "I—I did take the money out of the purse."

He stared at her doubtfully.

"You did?"

"Yes—I—I hid it."

"Where?"

"In the conservatory. Don't look at me like that. I'm not lying. You've played me to a standstill and—I quit."

"You mean you'll give me my share of the money?"

"Yes."

"Five thousand pounds? I get half of it?"

"Yes."

Anton moistened his red lips with the tip of his tongue. He ran his fingers back through his thick hair. This was a new problem.

"You little devil!" he said almost admiringly. Then with suspicion, "You say you hid this money in the conservatory. Where in the conservatory? Where? And no more funny business—I won't stand for it," he threatened, as he saw her hesitate.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"If I tell you where it is will you let me get it?" she asked.

"Let you get it? And then get away with it? I should say not. I'll get it myself."

She shook her head stubbornly.

"No. We'll get it together. You can stand over me, you can watch every move I make, but—I take the bills out and divide 'em. Don't make any mistake about that."

He frowned at this ultimatum, but she saw the spirit of greed shining in his eyes. Thank God, the other danger was past.

"You can divide the bills. Come on."

Anton went to the green door and turned the key.

"You go first. And remember, kid, if you try any crafty work, I'm right at your back and—if I don't get that money, the police get you."

She nodded indifferently and led the way along a dark passage, then down a narrow servants' staircase that ended in a door opening into the conservatory. As they moved on cautiously Anton kept his hand firmly on the girl's shoulder and, somehow, Hester was glad of this, for the half-darkness and the violence of the storm, frightened her. She had no thought any longer of escaping. She had done her best and failed. She had played her last card and lost.

This man had forced her to choose between being a thief and a wanton and—well, she had been a thief before. To save her body from prison and—a worse fate, she was ready to give Anton half of this stolen money, she must give it to him, she had no choice, and the other half, her half, she would return this to the bishop. That was all she could do.

## **"HER PROMISE TRUE"**

---

---

Hester opened the door at the foot of the stairs and stepped forward into the fragrant atmosphere of the plants and blooms. Anton was close behind her. She could feel his clutching hand. It was very dark within the conservatory and outside the storm was raging fearfully.

Suddenly the organ in the library began to play softly. Hester Storm stood still, listening at first in fear, and then, as the music wove its spell about her, with a kind of strange pleasure. Who could be playing so beautifully and tenderly there in the dark while she was here in such trouble?

A menacing pressure from the hand on her shoulder urged the girl to action. Stepping forward, Hester came to the rose bush in its gilded basket. A quick movement with one hand lifted the cylinder from its pot, then a search with the other brought her fingers in contact with the banknotes. There! She had them! Fifty hundred-pound notes! She had only to count off twenty-five and give them to Anton. That would silence him, but—would he take her word, in the darkness, that the count was straight?

She turned toward the chauffeur and, at this moment, became conscious that there was no longer any pressure on her shoulder. Anton had taken away his hand. She peered through the shadows, but could discern nothing save the vague outlines of a giant palm. She stretched forth her hand, but could feel nothing. The man had gone. At the moment of grasping a fortune he had gone. Why? What had happened?

In her concentration on the rose bush Hester had not seen the dull glow of a cigar burning in sinister watchfulness, there, in the far corner of the conservatory; but

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Anton had seen it and had drawn back stealthily, his heart pounding. It was Grimes lurking in the darkness, Grimes waiting for his prey.

And now, as Hester wondered at this strange disappearance of her persecutor, the organ stopped and a beautiful voice sounded from the library in a song that none can resist.

Gave me her promise true,  
Which ne'er forgot shall be,  
And for bonnie Annie Laurie,  
I'd lay down and dee.

"Her promise true!" These words went straight to the soul of this poor transgressor. It was like a voice speaking to her, a voice singing to her, a wonderful voice through the shadows of fear carrying its message of steadfastness and hope.

"Her promise true!" What had she promised? To be honest, to be kind. That meant giving back the money—and letting Anton hand her over to Grimes. Anton would do it, too, the cur. Then Grimes would send her up and—she'd never see Rosalie again and—she'd never be able to do anything for Rosalie.

Strange how this thought of Rosalie gave Hester strength to do the thing that would surely separate her from Rosalie, to do the thing that was right, whatever the cost! As she listened, breathless and motionless, reveling in that enthralling melody, it seemed as if she saw her sister's loving eyes, gazing at her tenderly.

It was Rosalie, the pure soul of Rosalie, speaking to her, pleading with her in golden song, bidding her be brave and—keep her promise and—give the money back—not half of it, but all of it.

## **"HER PROMISE TRUE"**

---

Inspired with this simple faith, the girl moved swiftly toward the wide glass door that led into the library. In her hand she held the banknotes. She was going to give them back. Anton and Grimes might do what they pleased. If punishment and shame must come, then let them come. She was going to return the money she had stolen and—do what her dear sister Rosalie would wish and—keep "her promise true."

With her hand on the door Hester paused. She remembered that Miss Thompson's desk stood at this side of the room, not more than ten feet distant. It was possible that, under cover of darkness and the music, she could reach this desk without attracting attention. If she could, then—then she might slip the money into one of the drawers and—and make her getaway through the park before Anton could be sure that she had thrown him down. He wouldn't tell Grimes until he was absolutely sure. She might have time to stop at the lodge for her things and—she could square old Mrs. Pottle somehow. There was just a chance, in this storm, that she could be off on a train to London before Anton would even tumble that she had started. He was a good deal of a fool, Anton, and a coward besides.

Well, she would take the chance. It meant liberty, everything and—this was playing fair. She had promised to give the money back, but—that didn't mean walking meekly into jail. To be honest, to be kind—there was nothing else to it. She had a perfect right to keep out of jail, if she could.

Lightly and swiftly Hester entered the library and glided across the room toward Miss Thompson's desk. Betty was still singing, but the Storm girl listened no longer. All her faculties were centered on the last des-

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

perate adventure. If she could only get away with this! If the kind God—Merle's God—Rosalie's God—would only let her get away with this!

Groping before her in the obscurity of the room, her hand touched the desk and, running her fingers over it, she came upon a partly open drawer. There was something white in it. A handkerchief! It was the top drawer on the left-hand side. She would remember that and wire Betty to-night—no, write her. The top drawer on the left-hand side, under the handkerchief. There! She crowded the banknotes back into the drawer with a farewell tap and cautiously pressed the drawer shut. The spring-lock clicked. She had kept her promise. She had returned the Bishop of Bunchester's five thousand pounds, while the bishop himself, all unconscious of this, sat, lost in pleasant reverie, not three yards away.

Swiftly and silently, as before, Hester left the room. Thus far fortune and the darkness and the music had favored her. It only remained to cross the conservatory, to open the outside door and then venture forth into the storm. Where was Anton? Where was Grimes?

With a supreme effort the girl conquered her fears and crossed the few feet that separated her from the tumult inside. And, close behind her in a dull red line, came the watchful cigar—and Grimes.

The Storm girl grasped the latch of the outside door and, at the same moment, a heavy hand descended on her shoulder.

"Anton!" she started.

"Guess again, little one," answered a voice that made her knees sink under her. "We've got you with the goods this time. Eh, Jenny Regan?"

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE FIVE-BAR GATE

"It may interest you young people to know," the bishop was saying in the library, "that Annie Laurie—you know she was the daughter of Sir Bert Laurie of Maxwellton, and—er—she married an ancestor of mine."

"Really! Tell us about her," exclaimed Betty, leaning forward eagerly.

"I'm afraid there isn't much to tell except that she would not marry the poor young man—what was his name? Did he write those tender verses about her?"

"He didn't?" frowned Bob, while Miss Thompson looked at him with a roguish smile.

"No. She married my ancestor. I have always had the deepest sympathy for that unappreciated poet."

Young Baxter nodded wisely.

"Perhaps he'd have been more appreciated if he hadn't written so much of a poet. While he was making rhymes about Annie your ancestor got busy with the girl, and the result was the thing Mr. Poet knew the other fellow had landed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the prelate. "That sounds like one of your father's remarks."

"Speaking of Father," Bob glanced at his watch, "I'm waiting for him up from town on this next train. I hope the law detains him."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"I hope not," said the churchman earnestly. "I have been looking forward to seeing my dear old friend and—er—I wanted him to be present in case this detective reports anything that seems—er—important."

"Exactly," agreed the young man.

At this moment Merle entered, looking pale and anxious, and, bowing respectfully to the bishop, he went close to Baxter and said something in a low tone.

"Oh! All right. I'll see him," nodded Bob. Then to Betty and his lordship: "If you'll excuse me, I—er—there's a little matter I must attend to." And he hurried off, followed by Horatio.

"Oh, Mr. Merle! May I speak to you a moment?" called the bishop.

Horatio turned and a faint flush spread over the ashen gray of his thin face.

"Yes, your lordship."

Bunchester's eyes rested on the curate in kindly solicitude, then with a ruddy smile he turned to Betty.

"I must tell you, Miss Thompson, that Horatio Merle and I are friends of long standing, and naturally, when he came to my bedroom this afternoon with a tray of tea and toast—exquisitely served, I must say—I was somewhat surprised and—er—after a little talk, I became acquainted with the unusual and—er—interesting position that Mr. Merle has chosen to occupy in this household."

As the prelate went on his manner became more and more serious until now, turning to the astonished and abashed Horatio, he addressed him with all the impressiveness of his sonorous voice and his full episcopal dignity.

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

Merle, you probably do not realize how deeply affected by what you told me this afternoon. I shake hands with you, sir, and say, both as your and as a fellow man, that I respect you and you for the fine simplicity and manliness you have here at Ipping House in accepting, I may say in ; a rather—er—humiliating position. I doubt, there is another clergyman in my diocese who be capable of such an act of Christian self-efface-

"I thank your lordship," murmured Horatio, re- g awkwardly toward the door.

"It! I haven't finished. Mr. Merle, you have better than you knew. It happens that my old Dr. Dibble, the rector of St. Timothy's in Ipping—as become so infirm that we are about to retire a pension. The living is in my hands and it is ention, sir, in fact, it is my absolute decision, to to you."

Horatio was so overcome by this extraordinary good- that for some moments he could not speak a word.

"Is it possible? He, a poor curate, who had made a of everything, suddenly lifted to this splendid ? He, the rector of St. Timothy's? He, Horatio

"your lordship!" he stammered.

"There is a fine old rectory with five or six acres of and the prettiest rose garden in Kent. I am sure d your wife will be happy there."

"Your lordship, I—I thank your lordship. I—I would —"

Horatio stood quite still, holding a few strands of his whiskers between an agitated thumb and forefinger.



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

He opened and closed his mouth several times and then, in a tumult of suppressed feeling, he hurried from the room.

Just as he was closing the door Betty flew after him.

"Oh, Mr. Merle, I am so happy! I congratulate you with all my heart."

She clasped his hand impulsively with such sweetness and genuineness that the good man's confusion was made more complete, if that were possible.

"Thank you, Miss Thompson—thank you. Please don't say any more. I—I must go. I—must tell my wife."

Horatio hastened away, his eyes shining with tears of joy.

And now there came a bad quarter of an hour for Elizabeth Thompson. It was evidently her duty to tell the bishop immediately, without losing a moment, about the stolen money. This was her opportunity to tell him; she was alone with him and—she must tell him. And yet she could not speak. She had promised Hester Storm to say nothing until after Grimes had gone. She had promised faithfully, and—for the moment her lips were sealed.

"Bishop," she began, and in her eyes there was the shadow of impending trouble.

"Yes, my dear. Sit down." He made room for her beside him on the davenport.

"There's something I've wanted to speak to you about—that is——"

"I understand, my dear," he anticipated. "You have reference to that unfortunate affair on the train? You know I came here to-day for the express purpose of—er—that is to say, I shall be glad to obtain, in fact, the

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

detective urged me to get from you, any information you can give regarding that painful occurrence."

"But—I wanted to ask you——"

She paused, biting her lips, and the prelate went on serenely.

"I have been told of your very great kindness to the suspected young woman who was in the carriage with us. I feel sure you acted in a sweet, pitying spirit, but you can hardly realize, my child, as one in my position does, the unwisdom of accepting too readily the unconfirmed statements of—er—shall I say plausible strangers. By the way do you happen to know what has become of this Jenny Regan?"

"Why—she told me—she spoke of living in New York, and—I think she was—going back there."

Betty's distress of mind was so evident that the bishop must surely have noticed it had it not been for the sudden entrance of Bob Baxter, whose pale face and disturbed manner showed that something serious had happened.

"I've been talking to the detective," he explained, "and—I want to apologize to both of you in advance, and especially to you, Betty, for what the man is going to say. He insists on coming in here, and—if I had my way I'd chuck him out of the house, but—he comes as an officer of the law, and I suppose I have no choice but to let him do what he considers his duty."

"Quite right," nodded the bishop. "We must respect the law."

Betty stared, white faced, before her while young Baxter went to the door and showed in the detective. Grimes had left his cigar outside.

"All right. Go ahead," said Bob with a contemptuous

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

glance at the newcomer. "Only, please make it as short as possible."

"I'm not in the habit of wasting words, Mr. Baxter," answered Grimes curtly.

"You mustn't mind, Betty," continued the young fellow, "if he asks you some rather impertinent question. It's only a formality, and it's part of his business. No, sir!"

Quietly ignoring this high-handed manner, the detective seated himself, and, facing the troubled secretary, went straight at the business in hand.

"You remember Jenny Regan, the girl who was in the railway carriage when the Bishop of Bunchester discovered that his purse had been stolen?"

"Yes, I remember her," answered Betty.

"You took a great interest in this young woman, you not? You offered her money, gave her your card, although she was a stranger. How was that?"

"I was sorry for her. She had had a hard struggle and I wanted to help her."

"Fine!" exclaimed Bob, and Grimes flashed him a sharp glance from under his thick eyebrows.

"You had no idea she was a professional pickpocket?"

"No."

"No idea that she stole the bishop's purse?"

"Certainly not."

"You believed her to be an innocent and deserving person?"

"I did."

"Miss Thompson, are you still of that opinion?"

"I am sure she is a deserving person," was the detective's reply.

"Who is?" asked Grimes quickly.

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

"Why, Hest—Jenny Regan," stammered Betty, and the detective smiled, but he paid no attention to this slip.

"You say deserving, but not innocent. Do you still think Jenny Regan innocent of stealing the bishop's purse?"

The crisis had come. Should Betty speak or keep silent? To speak would bring inevitable ruin upon this unfortunate girl, who had trusted her. Yet how could she not speak?

While she hesitated Bob spoke for her. "How can Miss Thompson possibly know whether Jenny Regan stole the bishop's purse or not?" he demanded.

"Miss Thompson has the best reason in the world for knowing that," Grimes answered, and there was a note of cold menace in his voice.

"See here," retorted the young fellow. "I won't stand for this. Either you make good your words or——"

"Keep still, my friend. I'll make my words good." Then, turning to the bishop, "I beg your lordship to believe that I am not speaking lightly." He drew from his pocket a brown leather purse clasped by an elastic band. "Does your lordship recognize this?"

"Bless my soul! My purse!" exclaimed the bishop. "Where did you find it?"

"With your lordship's permission I'll explain that—a little later."

Old Bunchester coughed impressively. "And the money?" he asked. "The five thousand pounds? Is it—in the purse?"

The detective shook his head. "Not a penny of it. The purse is empty. There!" He handed the lean wallet to its owner.

"Quite true," sighed the bishop. "It is empty."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Do I understand that you found this purse somewhere about here—I mean about this house?" demanded Bob.

"Yes," said the detective.

"And you have no idea where the money is?" inquired Bunchester anxiously.

"I have a very distinct idea where the money is," answered Grimes slowly, "and this young lady——" he faced Betty accusingly, "she also has a very distinct idea where the money is."

At this Baxter's eyes blazed fiercely. "You dare to——"

"Wait, Bob!" The girl laid a restraining hand upon his arm. Then, lifting her head proudly, she challenged Grimes. "You mean to insinuate that I took the money from this purse?"

"Impossible!" murmured the bishop.

A hard smile played about the detective's mouth.

"You mean to deny that you know where the money is?"

She hesitated. "Why—er——"

"Where is it?" he demanded.

"I—I can't tell you."

"You refuse to answer?"

"I—must refuse." She thought of her promise to Hester.

"My dear child," interposed Bunchester kindly. "I'm sure you are actuated by the most honorable motives, but this is a case where the whole truth must be told."

"Go ahead, Betty; tell what you know," urged Bob.

"I—I——" she began weakly, but rallied with a flash of anger. "I'll not be questioned like this." Her pride and fighting spirit were stirred now. The idea that she

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

as actually accused of stealing this money or of being an accomplice in the theft—it was outrageous, preposterous. Very well, if they thought her guilty they could begin on thinking so.

“I have made a serious charge here,” Grimes proceeded quietly, “and I propose to prove it.” He turned sharply to the girl. “Whose desk is that?”

“My desk,” she answered.

The detective examined the drawers carefully. They were all unlocked except the top one on the left-hand side.

“You keep this drawer locked?”

“Usually.”

“You have the key?”

“Yes. It’s in my bag.” She opened her bag and produced a flat key. “Here it is.”

“Has anyone else a key to this drawer?”

“No.”

Grimes looked at the key critically. “H’m! A spring lock. Do you mind opening this drawer?”

“Why should I open it? It’s my private drawer.” Betty thought of her Marcus Aurelius and Bob’s precious letter. Why should these sacred things be dragged out by this vulgar detective?

“Oh, it’s your private drawer, is it? Just the same, I must ask you to open it, Miss Thompson.”

“Very well,” yielded the girl. “There!” She put the key in the lock and turned it while Grimes watched her keenly.

“Now if your lordship will look in this drawer?” he said.

“Certainly,” bowed the prelate, and he pulled out the drawer to its full length, then started back with a cry

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

of amazement. "Good heavens!" He drew forth a bundle of folded banknotes. "It's the stolen money," he declared. "The exact amount! The identical notes! Five thousand pounds!"

Betty started in bewilderment. "But—I don't understand," she said.

Old Bunchester turned to the girl in deep concern. "My dear Miss Thompson, this is exceedingly painful, exceedingly compromising. I beg you most earnestly, in the interest of everyone, in your own interest, to tell us how it comes that this money is found in your desk. You must explain this mystery, indeed you must."

"Hold on!" cried Bob, springing forward, his whole face transfigured, and here it was, in the words of Hiram Baxter, that the boy showed himself a thoroughbred and took the five-bar gate in one clean leap. "Don't say a word, Betty. Don't explain anything. You're the finest, pluckiest girl I ever knew, and right now, without any explanation, I ask you to be my wife."

"Bob!" she cried, and her whole soul was in her eyes.

"It's all right, dear." He stood close beside her and drew her to him protectingly. "There are two of us now." Then, turning to Grimes: "Go ahead with your silly little game."

"All very pretty," sniffed the detective, while the bishop looked on in purple amazement, "but, before we get through with our silly little game you may not find it as silly as you think."

He strode across the library to the foot of the little stair and pointed to the mezzanine door. "If Miss Thompson was so confident that Jenny Regan was a deserving person why did she hide her in that room this morning?"

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

"What?" cried Bob.

Grimes fixed his hard gaze on Betty. "Do you deny that you hid Hester Storm, otherwise known as Jenny Regan, in that room?"

The girl eyed him steadily. "It's true," she said; "but—I can explain it."

Young Baxter started to his feet. "It isn't possible this Storm girl who's been working here is—Jenny Regan?"

Grimes nodded. "Jenny Regan is one of her aliases. It's a matter of police record. You knew this, didn't you?" He turned to Betty, whose cheeks were aflame with anger.

"Yes, I knew it," she flung back, "and what is more——"

"You knew she was a thief and a pickpocket?" he added.

With an effort the girl checked herself and stood panting.

"If your lordship will give me a few moments," she said in a low tone, "I can make everything clear. "You don't mind, Bob? Just a few moments?"

Baxter bowed to her wish. "Of course I don't mind. Come on," he said to Grimes.

"Not I," refused the latter. "Miss Thompson says she can make things clear to his lordship. So can I. His lordship's purse was stolen by Hester Storm, alias Jenny Regan, but this young woman," he swept Betty with a cruel look, "was an accessory after the fact."

"You miserable hound!" roared Bob.

And the bishop said solemnly: "My dear sir, you are making an incredible accusation. Miss Thompson is a lady—a friend of mine. I knew her estimable father."



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

---

"I can only lay the facts before your lordship," shrugged the detective. He went to the library door and, motioning quickly, returned followed by Hester Storm, who looked neither to the right nor the left, held her eyes straight down before her, as if studying the yellowish pattern in the carpet. Betty watched in surprise.

"There," Grimes pointed to Hester, "is my answer to your lordship's doubts. What is this woman doing here? She is a notorious thief and a pickpocket. Why did she come to Ipping House? Why did your lordship's friend, Miss Thompson, shelter her in that room and try to prevent me from arresting her? The answer is easy. It was because Miss Thompson proposed to share the money this Storm girl had stolen from your lordship."

"That's a lie!" rang out Betty's swift denial. "I know them it's a lie. You must tell them," she appealed frantically to Hester.

But the Storm girl never moved; she never spoke; never lifted her eyes from the carpet.

And Grimes went on relentlessly: "If Miss Thompson was innocent of this crime why did she not tell the whole truth about it when she was alone with your lordship not half an hour ago?"

"I wanted to tell the truth," insisted Betty, "but I had promised this poor girl that I would do nothing until—until the detective had gone." Again she appealed to Hester. "You know that is true. Tell them it's true."

But the Storm girl stood there like a frozen image; her lips closed, her eyes cast down. And a sicker terror filled Betty's breast.

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

ir lordship must see that there is a strong case  
this young woman." Grimes moved toward  
with a grim tightening of the lips. "You'll have  
e with me." He laid a hand on her arm.

ntly Bob Baxter stepped forward, his face as  
s Betty's.

e your hands off that lady."

I don't know," retorted Grimes. "I'm an officer  
law and——"

dear Mr. Baxter," reasoned the bishop, interpos-  
portly and venerable presence between the ex-  
diversaries, "believe me, we must respect the  
of the law."

esty nothing," stormed Bob. "I tell you——"

ll you to step back," ordered the detective. "And  
—" he faced Miss Thompson, "consider yourself  
arrest. If you have anything to get ready you'd  
to it. We start in——" he glanced at his watch,  
minutes."

t?" cried Baxter, aghast.

seriousness of the situation was now clear to  
ie.

here," the young man appealed to Grimes after  
ent's thought, "there's some horrible mistake.  
Thompson had nothing to do with stealing that

She couldn't steal. Look at her, man! You  
he couldn't. I'll be responsible anyway, or my  
will, for the money and everything else. You  
rag her off like this and disgrace her. By God, I  
et you."

sorry, sir, but I've no choice. A crime has been  
ted, and—there's evidence enough to hold her on  
was a cousin of the queen."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

"Under arrest!" murmured Betty twining her fingers together piteously and fixing her eyes on Hester.

At this moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard outside. Bob went quickly to the window.

"It's Father," he said with a movement of relief. "Cheer up, Betty. Dad will think of something."

A moment later Hiram Baxter entered the room. His face was ashen gray. He looked broken and ill, but a faint flicker of the old bright smile spread over his rugged face as he glanced about the room.

"Hello, everybody! Why, hello, Bish!" He tapped Bunchester playfully on the shoulder. "I'm awful glad to see you, Bish." Then, as he noticed the universal gloom, "Say, it strikes me you folks are a little frapped. What's wrong? What are you doing here?" he asked Grimes.

The detective started to explain, but Bob cut in eagerly.

"One moment! Father, did you leave twenty-five thousand dollars in the drawer of that desk?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars! Say, boy, is this a joke? If it is, I tell ye straight I don't like it."

"No, Father, it's not a joke; it's very far from a joke. Did you leave it there?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars in that desk? Say, you knew what I've been through to-day! I've been scratchin' around down where the avenues are paved with red-hot bricks, lookin' for twenty-five thousand dollars. And I didn't find it, either. No, sir, I left the money in that desk. It ain't my desk, anyway; it's Betty's desk."

"Ah!" smiled Grimes.

"Say, who are you, anyway?"

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

"I'm Grimes from Scotland Yard."

"Let me explain," put in Betty. "I—I'm in great trouble, Guardy."

"I'll tell him, dear," said Bob. "Father, I—I've asked Betty to be my wife."

"Well, it ain't that that's makin' ye look like a funeral, is it?" drawled Hiram. "Go on, now; let me have it."

Betty and Bob spoke at the same time, both pointing scornful fingers at Grimes.

"He says that I——"

"He dares to say that Betty——"

"Easy now! Not all at once. Say, Bish, you'd better tell it."

Buncheater coughed impressively. "My dear friend, it seems incredible, but the fact is Mr. Grimes thinks that Miss Thompson was concerned in the—er—misappropriation of that five thousand pounds."

"That was stolen from you? Betty Thompson? No, no, no!" thundered the old man.

"That is how we all feel, but, with the utmost regret I am forced to bear witness that this exact sum and, I believe, the identical banknotes were found in Miss Thompson's desk—there."

"Five thousand pounds? What does this mean, Betty? How did that money get in your desk?"

"I—I don't know," the unhappy girl answered.

Grimes looked at his watch again. "No use of any more talk," he said gruffly. "It's time to start and——" motioning to Betty, "you'll have to come with me."

"You don't mean——" Hiram's eyes burned savagely.

"I mean that these two women are under arrest, sir, charged with grand larceny, and I'm going to take 'em to London by the next train."

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

"But—I won't have it."

"Better not interfere, sir. I've men outside to help me, and—I'm going to take 'em. Come now." He caught Betty by the arm and marched her, half fainting, toward the door.

At this moment Hester Storm lifted her eyes, opened her lips, and spoke in a strange, low tone:

"Wait! You mustn't take her. She didn't steal the money. She had nothing to do with it. I stole the money. I put it in that desk. I'm the one to take."

"Hester!" cried Betty. "You—you put that money in my desk?" repeated Betty slowly.

"Yes. I meant to steal it or—I meant to steal half of it, but—when you sang that song about—her promise true, why—I thought how you'd been good to me, and—trusted me, and—I sneaked in here and left the money. The drawer was open, and I snapped it shut. Then, when I made my getaway he pinched me." She turned to Grimes.

The detective lowered his head as if he was studying the girl through his eyebrows.

"You told me a different story just now?" he said.

"Sure I did. I lied. You know I lied. You don't think I'm stuck on gettin' sent away for ten years, do ye? But if it's got to be her or me, well, I won't have her sent away when all she's done is to treat me right and try to save me. You can take that from Hester Storm."

"This is a rare and beautiful instance of gratitude and devotion," commented Bunchester.

"That's all right, Bish; but I want to know more about this." Hiram turned to Hester, who was standing with bowed head and clasped hands. "Well, fer a girl

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

who talks about stealin'—I guess some o' the honest folks could take lessons from you. Say, I didn't quite get that about how you planned to steal half o' this money? Where did the half come in? Why didn't ye plan to steal all of it?"

Then, little by little, with questions from Grimes and more questions from Hiram the Storm girl told her story, sometimes in broken words, as her feelings overpowered her, but in the main simply and bravely and truthfully, as one who is strengthened by some higher power. She went back to her childhood and spoke of her sister Rosalie. She told of her wanderings and waywardness, then of her visit to Ippingford and her meeting with Horatio Merle. Then, finally, of her efforts to return the money and of the persecution she had suffered at the hands of Anton. She kept nothing back, and she made no excuse for herself. She had sinned and it was right that she should suffer.

As Hester finished her confession every heart went out to her in genuine sympathy, and Grimes was seen to wipe his eyes.

"I want to say," he remarked, "that I've seen some strange cases in my time, but when it comes to a woman trying to steal money over again that she's stolen once so as to give it back—why, that's a new one on me."

"Ye can't ever tell what a woman's goin' to do," nodded Baxter.

"Anyway, I owe you an apology, Miss Thompson," the detective went on, and there was a little catch in his voice as he met Betty's grave, beautiful eyes. "Things certainly did look black against you, but—all I can say is, I'm sorry, Miss, I'm sorry."

"It's all right, old man," said Bob.

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

Whereupon the Bishop of Bunchester, clearing his throat ponderously, addressed these comforting words to Hester Storm: "My dear young friend, I am inexpressively touched by this story of your struggles and temptations and your splendid moral victory. It is a most meritorious case and one that the Society of Progressive Mothers will take up with enthusiasm. As for the outcome of this affair, speaking for the Progressive Mothers' Society and for myself, as bishop of this diocese, I can assure you that there will be no unpleasant consequences, so far as you are concerned. The money has been returned. You have truly repented of your sin and you have given an illustration of spiritual regeneration that will long be treasured in the annals of the Progressive Mothers' Society.

"And now, my dear Miss Thompson, how shall I express my great joy——" The bishop turned to Betty, and was about to launch forth into another sounding period when Hiram Baxter interrupted him.

"Excuse me, Bish, fer breakin' in on yer speech, but—I've had a bad day in town, and—if you don't mind takin' the detective into the next room and finishin' up the details of this purse business with him, why——" Baxter leaned back in his chair with signs of physical distress—"ye see, I'm just about all in."

"Why, certainly, my dear friend. Let us come in here." And, motioning to Grimes and Hester, he led the way into the conservatory and carefully closed the door behind him.

"Father! Is anything wrong?" asked Bob in concern.

"Guardy, you're ill?"

With anxious faces the young lovers stood beside the old man, who smiled at them wearily.

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

"Children, I've got bad news fer ye, awful bad news for ye," he said. "I've made the best fight I could, but that Henderson bunch, they've done me up. Independent Copper broke twenty points to-day in the New York market, and—I was long of the stock. My man cabled me the tip to sell, but I never got it. I never got it. That cable was held up." He bent forward, resting his big grizzled head on his hands in an attitude of utter despair. "It's all off, children. It's all off."

Betty's heart was pounding violently as she listened. Things had happened so rapidly in the last few hours that she had scarcely thought of Lionel and his wild sprint for the cable office. Had he failed to get there in time? Had he made some mistake? What could have happened to Lionel?

"Excuse me a moment," she said, and hurrying toward the conservatory, she threw open the door and looked about her.

One glance showed that something had happened, for her eyes fell on a murmuring group gathered about Anton and the detective. And there in the group, calmly smoking a cigarette, was Lionel Fitz-Brown.

"Lionel!" Betty called, addressing him by his Christian name for the first time in her life. "Please come here—quick." And then, when he stood before her, very indignantly: "The idea of your not coming to tell me!"

"Tell you about what?" he asked blankly.

"About the cable. Did you—were you in time?"

Fitz-Brown adjusted his monocle with great care, then, gradually, a smile spread over his face. "Oh, I say! The cable! You see, I got so beastly wet in the storm, Miss Thompson, that I—well, the fact is, I had on thin flannel trousers and they jolly well shrunk up to ~~my~~



## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

knees and—haw, haw, haw!" He exploded into uproarious merriment.

"Oh, Mr. Fitz-Brown," she wrung her hands beseechingly, "please tell me if you got the cable off by twelve?"

Lionel laid a reflective forefinger along his nose. "By twelve? No. No, I didn't."

"You didn't?" Betty's heart sank.

"I go it off five minutes before twelve. Haw, haw, haw!" He fairly doubled up in his enjoyment of this witticism.

Like a flash, Betty darted back to Hiram, thrilling with this good news. And at the same moment Grimes entered, holding a cablegram in his hand.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said respectfully to Baxter, "I've just arrested your chauffeur, Anton Busch. He's a crook, Slippery Jake, sneak thief and confidence man, wanted by the police in half dozen cities. He's been working some deviltry here, sir. I've just found this cablegram on him. It's addressed to you."

"Thank you," said Hiram with a look of inexpressible sadness in his eyes. "It's come too late."

"I'm sorry, sir. I—I'll wait outside," and Grimes withdrew, his hard face softened by a look of deep pity for the shattered old warrior.

Baxter sat still, looking at the yellow envelope. "Too late!" he muttered. "Oh, if I'd only got this cablegram in time!"

"Guardy, I want to tell you something," Betty began, but Hiram paid no attention.

"Nothing matters now," he went on bitterly. "I mustn't say that. I'm happy about you two. Betty! Bob!" He joined their hands and held them *strongly*. "It's what I've always dreamed of, but—I

## THE FIVE-BAR GATE

---

---

wanted to leave ye well fixed and now——” The tears were coursing down his grizzled cheeks. “We’re ruined—ruined.”

“No, no! We’re not ruined. You mustn’t say that, Guardy.” The girl dared not promise anything, for she did not know the result of her effort, but she pointed hopefully to the unopened cablegram. “Why don’t you open this? Why don’t you read it?”

He shook his head despairingly. “I know what it is. It’s the notice that I’ve been sold out and—everything’s gone. God! If I’d only known! If I could only have given the order to sell—even a few thousand shares.”

With a listless movement Hiram ripped open the cable envelope and drew out the yellow sheet. Betty thought her heart would stop beating as she watched his face. Slowly the look of amazement came. He rubbed his eyes and read the message again. Then he sprang to his feet with a great cry.

“What! It ain’t possible! Listen to this!” In his excitement, Hiram almost shouted the words written there before him. “‘Congratulate you on your splendid nerve. Executed order at once. Sold fifty thousand shares at top of market and closed out with twenty points profit. Gramercy.’ You hear that, Bob? Read it! Am I crazy or—— No, no! There’s something wrong. I didn’t show any splendid nerve. I didn’t cable any order to sell fifty thousand shares. There’s some mistake.”

“There’s no mistake,” cried Betty. “I cabled the order to sell.”

“You?” stared Bob.

“You?” gasped Hiram. “You cabled the order to sell

## THE BISHOP'S PURSE

---

fifty thousand shares of Independent Copper stock for my account? Fifty thousand shares?"

It was several moments before Betty could speak, and then, laughing and crying hysterically, she told what she and Lionel had done.

"I should say it was splendid nerve," said Bob. And folding his big, strong arms around her, "Betty, you darling!" he whispered.

She lay there happy in his arms and, looking up into his eyes with all the fondness of her soul, answered shyly and sweetly, "Bob, my love."

And Hiram Baxter, wiping away his tears of joy, muttered to himself (since no one else was paying any attention), "Holy cats! Is there anything a woman won't do?"

(1)

THE END







1870-1871

1872-1873

1874-1875

1876-1877

1878-1879

1880-1881

1882-1883

1884-1885

1886-1887

1888-1889

1890-1891

1892-1893

1894-1895

1896-1897

1898-1899

1900-1901

1902-1903

1904-1905

1906-1907

1908-1909

1910-1911

1912-1913

1914-1915

1916-1917

1918-1919

1920-1921

1922-1923

1924-1925

1926-1927

1928-1929

1930-1931

1932-1933

1934-1935

1936-1937

1938-1939

1940-1941

1942-1943

1944-1945

1946-1947

1948-1949


1950-1951

1952-1953

1954-1955

1956-1957

1958-1959



FEB 25 1954





